



**An exploratory study of education policy and school dropout in Bhutan**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examined school dropout in Bhutan in relation to macro-level policy (macro-level policy is policy which affects the whole country) and systemic programmes. An exploratory approach was necessary to appreciate the increase in school dropout in Bhutan. School dropout may appear small in number but its consequences are devastating, diminishing opportunities for personal success, employment and social integration. It is also likely to be associated with antisocial behaviours (substance abuse, criminal activities and misdemeanours). This study explored school dropout as it is becoming a growing problem in Bhutan, with students increasingly dropping out of school. The focus on school dropout so far has been primarily focused at a micro level, in terms of capturing the voices of teachers, students, school leaders, parental perspectives, but very little is known from the perspectives of the policy makers and/or Cabinet Ministries. The aim of this study was to conduct an exploratory study to capture the voices of the current Cabinet Ministers in terms of what explains school dropouts. A study of this nature was necessary as it provided macro level insights into how policy and governmental directives directly or indirectly came to influence student retention. Findings from the study revealed that the five Cabinet ministers with responsibilities that intersected with the issues of school dropout and who were the informants in this study believed the factors that contributed to dropout in Bhutan were socio-economic status (SES), absolute poverty, family and poor academic achievement. These findings can assist in formulating macro level policy which can impact system-wide practice in improving student retention.

**Keywords:** School dropout, retention, policy makers, Cabinet Ministers, policy, anti-social behaviours, unemployment, poverty, socio-economic status, family, academic achievement.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS**

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BCSEA	Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment
BNCA	Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency
Drayang	Entertainment club
Dzongkhag	District Administration
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
Gewog	A cluster of villages forms a block for village administration
GYTS	Global Youth Tobacco Survey
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
Ngultrum	Bhutanese currency
NSYB	National Statistics Year Book
NSBB	National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan
NU	Ngultrum
PPD	Planning and Policy Division
RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
UNICEF	United Nations International Children and Educational Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
YDF	Youth Development Fund

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## **PART A: INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY**

### **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY**

#### ***1.1. Introduction***

Bhutan has recorded a growing problem of school dropout over the last 10 years. When students drop out of school without acquiring basic knowledge and skills required for work and life, they are at a great disadvantage in numerous ways. For instance, from the equity perspective, it is of greater risk to the poorer section of society with a cycle of intergenerational poverty passed on from generation to generation (Orbeta, 2010). The education policy of the Bhutanese government is to offer 11 years of free and quality basic education up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade to ensure that children are instilled with knowledge, values and skills in accordance with the articles 9.15 and 9.16 of the Constitution of Bhutan (National Education Policy, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of education is to recognise education as a basic right for achieving the wider social, cultural and economic goals set for the country (Bhutan 2020 Part II, 1999). However, the very purpose of education is defeated when school dropout and youth unemployment are increasing, resulting in many negative consequences. Most juveniles and young people, who engage in anti-social behaviours and crimes within the urban centres, appear to have dropped out of school and are unemployed (Choden et al., 2014; Dorji, 2005). When children drop out of school at a crucial transition point in schooling, i.e. before completing even basic education (Grade 10), questions arise in terms of macro policy issues. There is an urgent need to review the macro-level policy holistically in terms of some of the systemic barriers e.g. affordability, curriculum, teacher capacity, infrastructure and support system) in schooling.

More specifically, students between grades 7 and 10 at middle secondary are dropping out in significant numbers. Samdrup (2009) found that the dropout rate in Bhutan in Grade 10 averaged 26.3 percent for boys and 33.4 percent for girls for three consecutive years 2006 – 2008. Similarly, the Policy and Planning Division (2011) recorded 16.9% (n=4,616) of students between grades 7 and 10 dropping out of schools in 2010-2011. The national completion rate of secondary school according to the Bhutan Living Standards Survey 2012 Report (Asian Development Bank & National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2013), stands at 71 percent, which means 29 percent do not complete secondary school. Similarly, non-completion figures for 2007 as per the Education Sector Review Commission (2008) support this data. For instance, according to their study, student enrolment in 2007 at primary level (up to Grade 6) was 10,4467 at middle secondary level 38,911 and at higher secondary level 8,816, which indicates that students may be either dropping out or repeating grades as they go up the higher grades. Notwithstanding these findings, school dropout has not been under the focus of the policy makers when there is a growing school dropout problem with its association to risky consequences for youths such as anti-social behaviours and unemployment (Dorji, 2005; Kinga, 2005, Raptan, 2014). While the above government statistics are primarily focused between grades 7 and 10, the overall national dropout rate is much higher as children drop out of school at every level and the grade repetition is also quite high; this compels children to drop out of school before completion of basic education. Therefore, the above government statistics are inconclusive and may not present the complete picture of the dropout problem in Bhutan.

School dropout is a complex and multi-faceted problem and it requires a comprehensive framework to understand the underlying factors. Several studies have focused on single factors for

example: poor academic achievement, health, grade retention, poverty and so on; others have looked at combined factors including societal characteristics, school characteristics, demographic characteristics, and individual characteristics (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Dorji, 2005; Drewry, 2007; DuPont et al., 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Hunt, 2008; Mathis, 2013; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim 2008; Rumberger, 2001; Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot & Van Den Brink, 2013a). However, a more comprehensive framework is required for this study. Thus, the framework containing individual characteristics, school characteristics and societal characteristics is considered alongside policy to understand the multi-layered problem (Witte et. al., 2013a).

Earlier studies undertaken in Bhutan managed to gather data from students and teachers only; however, there is little research undertaken at a macro policy level to adequately recognise this sudden increase in school dropout (Dorji, 2005; Gyamtsho, J-F, Getenet, Pullen, & Dorji, 2005; Gyamtsho, J-F, Getenet, Pullen, & Swabey, 2015; Subedi & Nepal, 2010). Very little is known from the perspective of policy makers, especially the Cabinet Ministers, as to the reasons for this rapid increase. The use of interviews that captured the voices of Cabinet Ministers was aimed at providing insights into the macro-level policy issues, which are likely to have a ‘trickle down affect’ in terms of policy, mandates and system level support in increasing student retention and reducing anti-social behaviour.

Having so many young students drop out of school and therefore miss out on education, may indicate that the country’s capacity to have a highly skilled and knowledgeable work force is seriously hindered and social stability, better health and participation in civic and democratic processes are also hampered (OECD, 2015). Hence, it is the responsibility of the policy makers to ensure that students are given the opportunity to have high quality education and training and the education system is equitable,

contributing to the country's socio-economic growth and social progress; development of universal human values that cater to not only Bhutanese society but global community at large; preservation of one's own culture and respecting other's heritage and conserve and safeguard environment. In order to bring about policy reforms in response to such a problem, a change of law is required to solve it (Birkland, 2015). However, it is wise to be mindful that to bring about any systemic change is not an easy task, because a flaw or drawback in a subsystem normally is part of a larger system and any reform is dependent, and will impact, on other sub-systems (Ning et al., 2010).

### ***1.2. Aim of the Research***

The aim of this study was to explore the school dropout problem in Bhutan through the voices of Cabinet Ministers. The study took a top down approach of exploring macro and system level issues through the perspectives of the current Cabinet Ministers in terms of how policy and governmental directives directly or indirectly influence student retention or what explains school dropout.

### ***1.3. Research Questions***

#### ***1.3.1. Preamble***

Bhutan has significant issues with respect to poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, school dropout and anti-social behaviour.

#### ***1.3.2. Questions***

1. Do existing top-level policies recognise the issues of poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment

and anti-social behavior in relation to school dropout?

2. Are existing educational policies appropriate for a nation with these issues according to Bhutanese policy makers?
3. Are there alternative policies which might better address the issues or is it possible to suggest which of the policies might have the most impact?
4. How does policy in Bhutan impact upon student retention and dropout from the perspective of policy makers and legislators?

#### ***1.4. Implications of the Study***

The findings from the study could have policy implications at the macro level by way of influencing educational as well as social policy reforms. Additionally, issues such as the purpose of education and its productivity, compulsory schooling and alternative education, child labour and so on may be affected if policies are reformed.

#### ***1.5. Significance of the Study***

No study has been undertaken at a macro level to capture the voices of Cabinet Ministers in Bhutan. In addition, few studies have focused on students, teachers, parents and school leaders' perspectives of the school dropout problem. Results from this study will not only enhance deeper understanding of the school dropout problem but will add new knowledge leading to future policy reforms and actions.



### ***1.6. The Case Study Site***

Bhutan is divided into 20 districts with a total population of 755,474, of which 121,742 people live in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan (Asian Development Bank and National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2013). In other words, 16.11% of the country's population lives in Thimphu alone. As the capital city is known to have better infrastructure facilities and modern amenities compared to the other 19 districts and also the fact that almost all-important employment agencies are based in Thimphu, youth migrate to the capital city for employment. As a result of this rural to urban migration and unemployment, there are social disruptions and anti-social behaviour in the capital. According to the records of the Crime Branch of Royal Bhutan Police (2014), youth up to 24 years committed 2,272 crimes between 2009 and 2012. In 2013 alone, 51 crimes were committed by youth 24 years and below. Therefore, Thimphu is chosen as the study site for two reasons, first, the crime rate is the highest in the country, where unemployed youth and school dropouts are supposed to be found and secondly, the participants of the interview, Cabinet Ministers reside in the capital city. Therefore, it was convenient for the researcher to interview them at their residences even after their office hours.

### ***1.7. Definition of Anti-social behaviour***

Youth commit crimes due to various reasons and under different circumstances. Thus, there seems to be a number of different definitions of anti-social behaviour varying from context to context and across cultural and social norms and values. For instance, according to McAtamney and Morgan (2009), "Western Australia Police define anti-social behaviour as any behaviour that disturbs, annoys or interferes with a person's ability to go about their lawful business" (p.1). According to them, one

more widely used definition of anti-social behaviour is based on UK legislation which defines anti-social behaviour as “behaviour which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more people who are not in the same household as the perpetrator” (p. 1).

Therefore, arriving at a definition of anti-social behaviour is difficult as there are dissimilarities with respect to what different societies or countries define as being anti-social which are normally based upon interpretations of what they accept as truth in that particular local community. For instance, Muncie (1999) stated that to define fully the anti-social behaviours of youth as troublesome or criminal is difficult. Criminologists have coined the word ‘delinquency’ to refer to youth behaviour, which may warrant a criminal penalty. Some sociologists are of the opinion that a ‘crime’ is not only an infringement of a law but is a breach of social and moral behaviour (Sellin, 1938). The Penal Code of Bhutan states that persons below 18 years of age are to be awarded half the sentence given to adults for criminal offence (Mediamax Consultancy, 2013).

However, for the purpose of this study, anti-social behaviour is defined as youth between the ages of 13 and 24 committing criminal activities, abusing substances and committing other misdemeanours that infringe laws and disturb social harmony and peace in the neighbourhoods and communities. This definition is based on the National Youth Policy (2011), the mandates culminating from the national legislation and international orders. According to the National Youth Policy Document (Ministry of Education, 2011), young people of ages from 13 – 24 are officially identified as Bhutanese youth. This official acceptance is based on some international mandates such as the United Nations and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN and World Health Organization (WHO) and national policies like the Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004 and the Labour Act of Bhutan, 2007. The

priority target youth groups between ages 13 – 24 are out of school youth, unemployed young people, young people engaging in risky sexual behaviour, young people using drugs and alcohol and engaging in crime and violence. Thus, the NYP (2011) states that

Recent statistics indicate that they are most at risk from major socio-economic challenges including unemployment, low income, physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, crime and violence and a wide range of health issues, significantly HIV/AIDS and reproductive health with young women being most disadvantaged. The rising trend in these areas reported every year, necessitates greater and renewed impetus for synergized efforts in the planning, implementation and evaluation of youth programmes. (p.8)

Therefore, the government recognises the critical issues and rising anti-social behaviours of youth in the country especially in urban centres and has made attempts to mitigate or prevent this social problem before it gets out of control.

### ***1.8. Summary***

This chapter provided a background and context of the study including information about the purpose of the study, its research aims and questions, implications and significance and the reasons for choosing the study site. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to this study in terms of capturing the voices of the Cabinet Ministers with regard to factors for school dropout with special focus on policy interventions. Chapter 3 dwells on the research methodology. Chapter 4 through chapter 7 provide discussions on results and findings with regard to factors for school dropout and themes. Finally, chapter 8 draws some conclusions and make recommendations for policy actions.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1. Introduction*

Research from dropout studies reveal that no single factor influences a student's decision to drop out; it is a complex and multi-faceted problem involving a range of factors (Dorn, 1996; Hunt, 2008; Rumberger, 2011, Rumberger, 2001; Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010) While a number of factors may explain the reasons for students dropping out of school, the consequences are multiple with adverse effects on the individual, as well as on the social and economic progress of a nation.

As school dropout is an emerging problem with complex and detrimental consequences, it requires an in-depth study to understand the underlying factors. According to Rumberger (2001), numerous theories have been developed, suggesting that a student's decision to drop out of school is a final stage in a dynamic and continuous process of disengagement. As school dropout is a cumulative process of disengagement, an individual's decision to drop out is not only influenced by one's own behaviour but the environment in which a student lives also influences it.

Therefore, there is a relationship between personal behaviour and the social and physical environments in which they occur (Morris, Marzano, Dandy, & O'Brien, 2012). The very nature of the relationship between personal behaviour and environment posits this study to explore school dropout processes better in relation to policy issues linked to personal characteristics, school characteristics and societal characteristics. Literature has suggested a number of strategies at personal, family, community and school levels, but by far, policy interventions are known to be more effective in curbing the dropout problem to a large extent (Dianda, 2008; Gonzalez, Kennedy, & Julien, 2009; Rumberger,

2011).

The review of literature for this study is organized around the research questions to provide a framework provided below (Figure 1) beginning with education policy issues to personal, school and societal characteristics in the subsequent sections and subsections. In search of relevant literature, the study relied on books, journal articles and reports to review for the study.

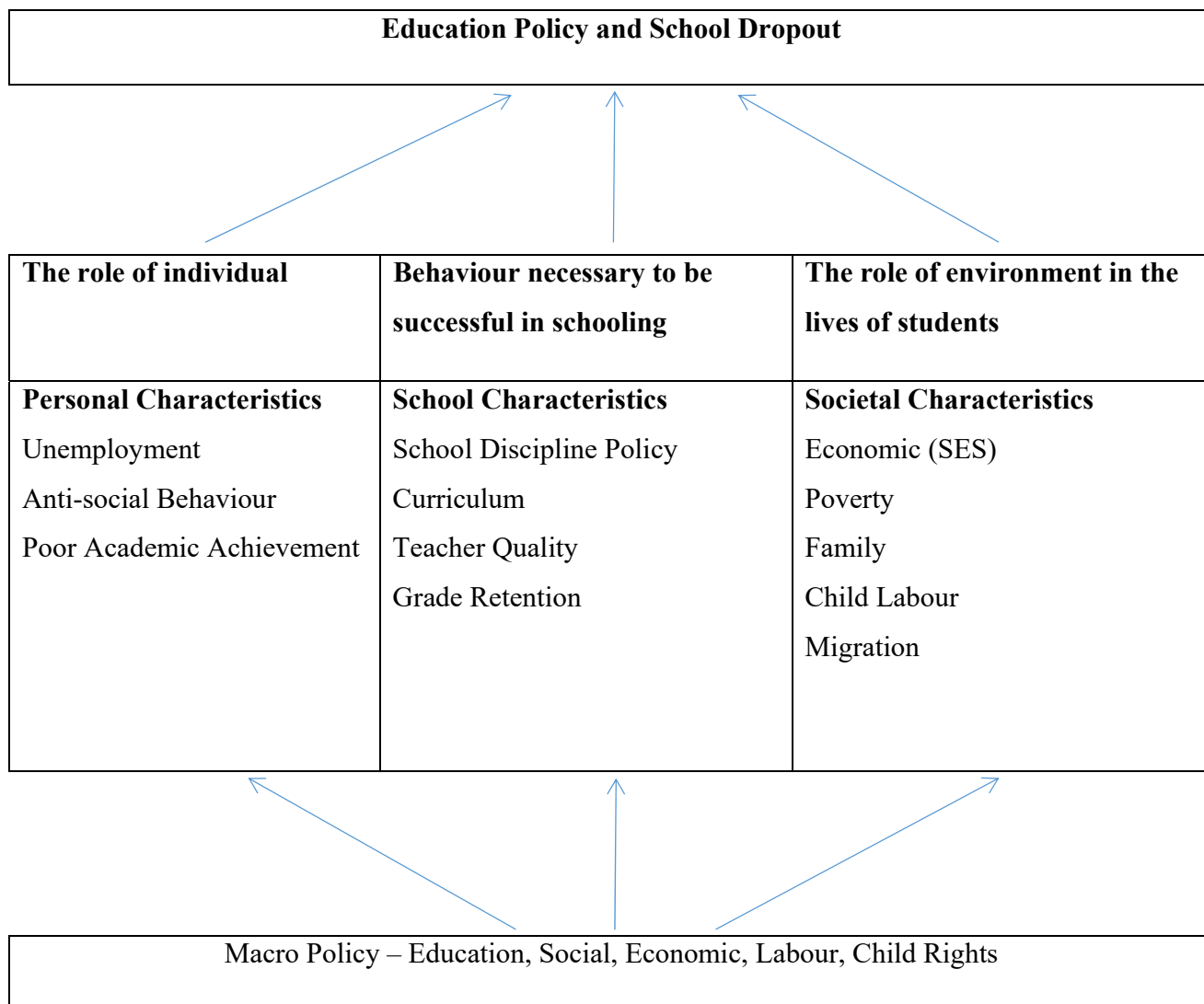


Figure 1. Framework for education policy and school dropout study.

The behaviour of a student is shaped by the environment and other factors both within and outside school and to have sound policy creation in education, social, and economic areas etc. is crucial.

## ***2.2. Policies: Education, Social, Economic, Labour***

The necessity for change of education policy may arise as a reaction to a problematic system or strategy or set of problems that are considered and felt crucial for policy reforms (Haynes, 2002). He further reiterated that policy-making in education is a continuous process, because of the constantly changing situations or circumstances which requires policy reforms.

In their review of education policies in the developing countries, Kingdon et al. (2014), commended some governments on educational reforms while others needed prompts. Little (2011) also stated that governments needed political determination to bring about policy reforms in education. On a cautionary note, OECD (2015) reported that while some policies may alleviate and create positive impact, sometimes, formulation of education systems and implementation of system level policies tend to backfire and aggravate socio-economic discrepancies and may lead to exclusion or school dropout.

Similarly, Apple (2009) stated: "... policies often have strikingly unforeseen consequences. Reforms that are instituted with good intentions may have hidden effects that are more than a little problematic" (p. 241). He further reiterated that a number of policies on education, social and economy when implemented in the field tend to bring benefits to a group of already privileged people rather than the actually needy people.

Rumberger (2001) also stated how a systemic reform initiated in the US to decrease dropout, failed to live up to its expectations as there was a gap between the policy and practice. According to Apple (1996), such a policy gap occurred when the policy makers or people in power failed to understand, analyse and address the problems of schools and students. They perceived school dropout and students at risk of dropping out as inherent weaknesses of schools and students themselves.

Therefore, he cautioned that when such a narrow approach is adopted, there is a risk of losing the capacity to look at the problems more critically, thereby losing out on larger political and economic contexts. Thus, according to the OECD (2015), any policy reform could be effective, if policies are well planned and implemented and constantly supported by ongoing processes of evaluation or assessment. In the absence of such a mechanism, policy can impact on a system either positively or negatively, with direct or indirect outcomes (Sabates & Feinstein, 2007).

School dropout is a worldwide problem, with governments and policy makers looking for ways to mitigate the problem (Wilson, Tanner-Smith, Lipsey, Steinka-Fry, & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, all policies must play center stage, while targeting a reduction of dropout rate (European Commission, 2013). Dropout is not a separate incident happening on its own as there are processes involved with certain conditions and circumstances, which compel a student to drop out. Thus, Hunt (2008) and Witte et al. (2013a) urge policy makers to address those processes and causal factors and correlations between variables with appropriate policy interventions. In order for the policy makers to make appropriate policy interventions, what they need is the theory culminating from the experiences of the people affected by a previous policy or people likely to be in a problem. In this respect, qualitative research plays a crucial role in providing answers to policy makers (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Most studies globally have taken the perspectives of students, parents, family, teachers, principals; community leaders and so on into account to study dropout and youth crimes (Iachini, Buettner, Anderson-Butcher, & Reno, 2013) but very few studies have captured the voices of policy makers. Studies also indicate that the school dropout problem should not be perceived as failures on the part of students alone, but dropout should be considered as an indication of ‘fundamental inequities’



and failure on the education system (OECD, 2015; Smeyers & Depaepe, 2006). Dorn (1996) observed that school completion is every citizen's right under any democratic system. However, very little or no study seems to have pointed out to legislative and policy decisions as one of the factors contributing to school dropout. Thus, most often, school dropout is not considered as a policy problem although Kelly (2012) stated that there are multiple factors for dropout produced by inappropriate education systems and many studies have pointed to policy recommendations as effective and meaningful strategies for student retention (Witte et al., 2013b).

| According to Sabates et al. (2010), Tanzania has recorded high enrollment and low dropout because its government has paid attention to political and budgetary factors, making education relevant and also making education compulsory for all children attaining 7 years of age and overage out of school children between 8 – 11 years. While Tanzania has adopted a compulsory education policy for lower primary school, many countries around the world have policies of compulsory basic education. For example, Machin, Marie and Vujic (2012) and Sabates and Feinstein (2007) reported that the compulsory school leaving age laws of some of the States in the United States and increasing the school leaving age in England and Wales to reduce crime have proven effective. Similarly, Mathis (2013) is of the view that laws should require students to attend school until age 18 or graduation, so that all stakeholders are in a win-win situation, although, each country has its own unique situation to consider and might not be able to generalise.

In Bhutan, with the increasing school dropout (Dorji, 2005; Samdrup, 2009; Subedi & Nepal, 2010), rising youth anti-social behaviours (Dorji, 2005, Mediamax Consultancy, 2013, Royal Bhutan Police, 2014), falling quality of education (Education Sector Review Commission, 2008 (ESRC);

iDiscoveri Education and the Royal Education Council (REC), 2009), and rising youth unemployment (Kinga, 2005; Raptan, 2014), policy reviews and reforms are called for from all quarters of the society (National Youth Policy, 2011). Emergence of a number of macro level policies recently in Bhutan such as the National Youth Policy (2011), the National Education Policy (2012), the National Employment Policy (2013), the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) and the establishment of Central Schools in 2015 which are all geared towards combating rising youth challenges and the overall education system is evident enough of the rising youth problems and societal dissatisfaction with the current education system (National Council Education Review Committee, 2016).

The National Youth Policy (2011) is aimed at protecting Bhutanese youth from vulnerabilities and to guide them towards a meaningful life in society. The youth target groups are school dropouts, unemployed, orphans, youth with risky sexual behaviour, drugs and alcohol abusers, youth with disabilities, young monks and nuns. According to Choden (2016), the launching of the National Youth Policy by the government was an important milestone for the youth and people of Bhutan. However, she cautioned that much needs to be done to fill the gap between the commitment and implementation.

Similarly, the National Education Policy (2012) recognises curriculum as the backbone of its education system in terms of delivery of holistic and quality education which equip students with values and attitudes besides imparting basic skills for employment. Nevertheless, the National Council Education Review Committee (2016), reviewed the overall impact of the Bhutanese education system and reported that the school curriculum needs a number of revisions to suit the student as well as societal needs. Additionally, the National Education Policy (2012) also points out that only the top 40% of the cohort graduating from grade 10 are eligible for scholarships and enrollment in government

higher secondary schools. This screening process based on merits does not appear to make much sense as there is disproportionately a big gap between the primary enrollment of 95% and the 40% intake capacity of government schools at the secondary level (Annual Education Statistics, 2016).

Further, the National Education Policy (2012) categorically stated that to cater to the diverse needs and abilities of the youth, Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) shall be offered from grade 9 and above aiming to cover 60% of the students to equip youth with technical and vocational skills for better employment opportunities after graduation. However, Kinga (2005) and the Policy and Planning Division (PPD) (2012) of the Ministry of Education pronounced that the government may need to re-look at this policy urgently as the policy is yet to transform into school curriculum and the handful of existing Vocational Institutes are unable to meet the demands as thousands graduate each year.

Yet another contentious issue found in the National Education Policy (2012) is in regard to the School Development Fund fee that each student has to pay annually to their school. The school collects this Ministry of Education approved fee annually to be used by the school for its development purposes. Whenever a student is unable to pay fee, the School Management Board has the authority to waive it. However, proper criteria need to be drawn for clarity.

Against the back drop of the above policy issues, an NGO called Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW Bhutan, 2015) conducted a comprehensive nation- wide study about the vulnerability of children in Bhutan covering three districts: Paro in the West, Tsirang in Central Bhutan and Trashigang in the East; the study covered 37 Gewogs (cluster of villages put together) and 891 respondents. The study was conducted mainly to underline the different types of vulnerabilities including school dropout and youth crimes and also to bring the problem of children's vulnerability to

the attention of the policy makers and legislators. The study also suggested measures and interventions for the government.

RENEW Bhutan (2015) reported that Bhutan ratified and adopted international conventions like the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) and the Beijing Declaration on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights, amongst other international and regional conventions and implemented Article 9, Section 18 of the country's Constitution. This Article recognises the need to protect children against all kinds of discrimination and exploitation. However, adoption of Legislation and Acts related to child rights and protections and formation of CSOs have not “ensured protection of all Bhutanese children. Children in Bhutan continue to be victims of unpaid labor. There are also orphans, children with disabilities, girls who marry at a tender age and children born out of wed lock” (p. 4). All these vulnerabilities contribute to school dropout anti-social behaviour. Therefore, policy makers with powers in policy making are known to directly or indirectly determine the outcomes and influence the system level support (Geurts, 2011) and safeguard the personal interests of vulnerable students. The next section dwells on personal characteristics.

### ***2.3. Personal Characteristics***

Personal characteristics such as unemployment, anti-social behaviour and poor academic achievement are risk factors related to school dropout as pointed out by studies (DuPont et al., 2013; Rumberger, 2001; Witte et al., 2013a). These three school dropout issues are related to personal characteristics and are discussed in the following subsections.

### **2.3.1. Unemployment**

Besides the consequences of school dropout leading to delinquency and anti-social behaviours, unemployment is another damaging consequence for school dropout as a source of social dependency and economic liability (Gonzalez et al., 2009). At the individual level, school dropouts will comparatively have limited opportunities for further studies or trainings which will ultimately put them into a disadvantageous position in a competitive labour market as they lack the educational requirement and skills, leading to low income trajectory (Orbeta, 2010; Rumberger & Lamb, 2003). Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry (1997) also claim that if youth unemployment is simply considered as a problem of lack of skills, then it is due to the structural changes in the labour market influenced by globalisation. In a study carried out by Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Palma (2009) in the United States, they found that high school dropouts face a series of unemployment problems in the labour market. Compared to their better educated counterparts, they are less likely to be employable and they often remain unemployed, even when there is work available, due to lack of adequate knowledge and skills required for work.

This problem of mismatch between the youth job seekers and the market exists in Bhutan too. There is a high degree of youth unemployment at 9.6% (n=70,000) between 15 – 24 years of age (Labour Force Survey Report, 2013; PPD, 2012; World Bank & National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2013). According to Raptin (2014), although the youth unemployment rates over the past couple of years have fluctuated from 5.3% in 2003 to 9.7% in 2006 to a record high of 12.9% in 2009 and 7.3% in 2012, the average youth unemployment rates from 2009 to 2012 has remained at 9.65%. The Bhutanese unemployment rate is lower than the world average of 12.47 but slightly higher than the South Asian

average of 9.4%. According to the above reports, out of school youth, between the ages 15 – 24 and without any kind of employment whether part-time or full time was considered for the studies, although methodologically and conceptually, there were likely problems.

Some of this youth population could be school dropouts as most school dropouts are found to be migrating to towns and cities looking for employment (Dorji, 2005). As the labour market increases, it demands for educational requirement and skills for the jobs. School dropouts and youth without basic education and skills do not find jobs, creating a mismatch between demand and supply (Kinga, 2005; Tracer Study, 2012. The National Youth Policy (2011) too recognised that school dropouts who enter the labour market are considered as unemployable since they lack basic required skills and functional literacy.

These findings in Bhutan that school dropouts are unemployable in the labour market due to lack of required skills appear to align with the wider international research studies as well as the recent study by Rapten (2014). Rapten found that there is a demand for skilled labour in the growing Bhutanese market on the one hand and on the other hand, there is unprecedented growth of youth unemployment at 9.65% looking for jobs currently. For example, according to the Annual Education Statistics (2014), there were 70,000 youth job seekers in the labour market in 2013, out of which only 1,311 students were admitted in 11 government Vocational Training Institutes due to limited intake capacity. The plight of the rest was not known; apparently most doing nothing productive and unfortunately with a tendency to migrate to towns and create anti-social behaviours (Dorji, 2005).

### **2.3.2. *Anti-social Behaviour***

Some kind of connection between lack of academic achievement, substance abuse, deviant behaviour and bonding to anti-social peers and dropout are known among researchers and educators (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; DuPont et al., 2013), although, it cannot be claimed that school dropout is the sole cause of anti-social behaviour and vice versa; these two are separate issues which require different studies. However, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, West Virginia (USA), three-quarters of prisoners in the state and three-fifths of prisoners in the federal prisons are high school dropouts (Gill, 2009; Kelly, 2012). Literature also provides evidence that dropouts and students at risk of dropping out have been using cigarette, marijuana and other substance abuse items (Aloise-Yong, & Chavez, 2002; Townsend, Flisher, & King, 2007). This suggests that there may be some kind of influence by one another, although there is no clear causal link in terms of independent and dependent variables shown in the above studies.

In Bhutan, a few studies carried out in relation to school dropout and youth behaviour also suggested that young people both within and outside schools in Bhutan are found to be engaging in anti-social behaviour including crimes such as burglary, gang fights, rape, manslaughter etc. Dorji (2005) used police records to find that most adolescents and youths who committed crimes in urban centers were likely to be school dropouts. Similarly, the study by Gyamtsho et. al. (2015) found that most of the inmates in the rehabilitation centres in Thimphu and Chukha were school dropouts who had committed anti-social behaviours (eg. drugs abuse, stealing, gang fights, breaking of car windows, rape etc.) However, their sample was small and not representative enough. Further, the study by Mediamax Consultancy (2013) was also based on criminal activities of youth tracing back former inmates of the

Youth Rehabilitation and Development Center which suggested that the former inmates had relapsed into criminal and anti-social behaviour.

In addition to the above anti-social behaviours and crimes, although, use of drugs is illegal according to the Narcotics Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse Act 2005 of Bhutan and anyone caught is liable for penalties, but its use especially by youths is on the rise (Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency, 2014). There is widespread abuse of substance and other criminal activities taking place both within and outside schools in Bhutan. In a national survey carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2009), involving 10,061 males and 10,696 females from 60 schools from grades 7 to 12, more than 60% percent of the male students from grades 9 to 12 said that their friends used cannabis, alcohol or a solvent, while one third of the female students answered similarly.

Likewise, a 'Rapid Situation and Response Assessment' (RSRA) survey carried out by Panda, Chowdhury, Dendup, and Pahari (2009) with 431 male and 457 female respondents from grades 6 to 8 and 546 males and 616 female respondents from grades 9 to 12 to determine who participated in drug use, alcohol consumption, and sexual involvement. The results revealed that approximately 20% of the students in the lower grades (6 to 8) and almost double the proportion of the students in higher grades (9 to 12) reported having friends who used alcohol. The RSRA survey (Panda et al., 2009) also interviewed 91 male and female drug users in the community. The study showed that students used drugs such as glue for sniffing, cigarettes, alcohol, nitrazepam etc. According to the Bhutan narcotics Control Agency (2014), of all the arrested people, students topped the list of offenders with 35% as per their records from 2001 to 2014.



By the same token, the World Health Organization reported data from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey of Bhutan (2015) involving 1,378 students between ages 13 – 15. The findings showed that there was a substantial rise in tobacco use amongst boys from 28.6% in 2006 to 39% in 2013 and amongst girls, from 12.4% in 2006 to 23.2% in 2013. The study reported that there was an increase in undesirable youth behaviour despite the legal ban on the sale of tobacco in Bhutan through the Tobacco Control Act 2010. For instance, 54.5% of student smokers reported that they obtained tobacco products from a store, shop or street vendor (Global Youth Tobacco Survey of Bhutan, 2015).

These findings have serious policy implications and the World Health Organization suggested that policy makers should implement comprehensive tobacco control policies across all levels of the society especially addressing the youth. This, they said, would not only reduce the illnesses and deaths but it would drastically reduce the health and economic burden to the country and increase human productivity into the future. Therefore, a study with a wider scope of mitigating the youth problem in the country is what this study has attempted to achieve through policy analysis and systemic interventions to enhance academic achievement and student retention.

### **2.3.3. *Poor Academic Achievement***

Poor academic achievement is one of the important factors related to school dropout (DuPont et al., 2013; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Rumberger, 2004; Witte et al., 2013a; Rumberger, 2001). It is one of the earliest and strongest signals of student dropout (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The lack of personal interest in studies begins as early as elementary school, affecting a child's academic achievement. Hence, keeping a child longer in school is expected to ensure a decline in dropout and

encourage students to continue rather than drop out (Orbeta, 2010). However, research has also indicated that by simply retaining and staying longer in school does not help, unless meaningful learning takes place with structural support and appropriate policy and programmes put in place. (Hanushek, Lavy & Hitomi, 2007).

Truancy is another early warning sign that a student is likely to drop out; when he/she has a record of frequent unexcused absences from school, they often experience poor academic achievement and grade failure (Cumbo & Burden, 2012). Truancy, not only leads to poor academic achievement and eventual school dropout but it is also a strong risk factor for delinquency, substance abuse, violence and teenage pregnancy (Rumberger, 2001).

Other factors such as academic failure in the forms of poor test scores and grades, student mobility through frequent changes of residences and schools, academic disengagement by remaining absent or not doing their school work and migration from rural to urban areas contribute to poor academic performance which lead to school dropout (Hunt, 2008; Rumberger, 2001; Witte et al., 2013a). Further, parental and family background characteristics such as their education level and income and their involvement in their children's education are correlated to a great degree in students' academic achievement (Almeida, Johnson, & Steinberg, 2006; Cumbo & Burden, 2012; Young, Siaens, & Goyal, 2009).

While there are several factors which affect a student's academic achievement, according to Battin-Pearson et al. (2000), research has also found that school climate and school bonding are strongly related to school dropout and academic achievement. Children who are academically successful are less likely to drop out. Therefore, it is vital that a good school culture and environment are created in school

in which children feel welcomed with positive teacher attitude, whereby learning and participation in extra-curricular activities are enjoyable and meaningful. For example, Cumbo and Burden (2012) emphasised that if a school does not welcome and create a caring environment, students are likely to disengage, display truant behaviour and ultimately drop out. Hanushek et al. (2006) also affirmed that children's decision of their schooling is strongly influenced by the quality of education. Students studying in a low-quality school are more likely to drop out than their counterparts attending a good quality school. Research has also shown that if students find education irrelevant to their needs and interest, they tend to drop out of school (Cumbo & Burden, 2012).

Likewise, in a study in Bhutan by Choden, Yangkee, Wangmo, Tshering, and Zangmo (2014), student dropouts said that they dropped out of school because they found the quality of what they learnt uninteresting, meaningless and irrelevant to their life. In this context, providing functional learning content for students seems to be important. Hence, school characteristics such as teacher quality and curriculum are important factors for student retention.

#### ***2.4. School Characteristics***

Although personal characteristics are found to be important components of the school dropout equation in exerting tremendous influences on young people, school related characteristics are also found to be equally influential. Hence, curriculum, teacher quality, school discipline and grade retention are discussed in the subsequent subsections.

#### **2.4.1. Curriculum**

Broad curriculum aims in most countries emphasise the transfer of knowledge which is seen to be valuable for national or economic development, social unity, political identity, or religious and cultural independence. According to Plank, DeLuca and Estacion (2008), one vital feature of the school environment is the curriculum that offers various courses to students. A secondary school curriculum may be considered as socially planned opportunities and a combination of all courses offered throughout a secondary schooling determine the future career of students after graduation. Donnelly and Wiltshire (2014), reviewing the Australian school curriculum said that it is of utmost importance to know that no matter how good the envisioned curriculum may be, it will be of little use if it is implemented poorly in classrooms and schools.

Literature suggests that some children are found to drop out of school because of curriculum related issues. The curriculum offered in school is expected to be relevant and interesting to match student interest. In a study conducted by Lamb et al. (2004), drop out students said that they had dropped out of school because of a lack of interest or irrelevant courses offered by school. Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010) also found that children were dropping out of African primary schools because of poor quality of education delivered in schools. Similarly, Gul, Gulshan and Ali (2013) stated that one of the main causes of school dropout in Pakistan amongst male students was irrelevant curriculum which did not relate to real life situations.

Therefore, as Finn (1989) stated, school dropouts could be regarded as a failure of the educational system as young people have failed to achieve basic education required for productive life. In Bhutan, in the last one decade and a half, the education system has drawn public attention over the effectiveness of

the current education system. As a reaction to the public outcry and extensive media coverage of the perceived deteriorating quality of education in the country, the issue was deliberated in the successive national parliament. Following these deliberations, the government formed a 10-member Education Sector Review Committee (ESCR) in 2006 to review the country's education system and also instituted the Royal Education Council (REC) in 2007 as a research institute. In 2014, the Cabinet again conveyed an executive order for preparation of the Education Sector Blueprint 2014 – 2024. All these are indications that the Bhutanese education system requires overhaul reforms of its overall education system with the changing market demand and global environment (Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014; ESRC, 2008; REC, 2012).

The ESRC (2008), reviewing the education system of Bhutan, cautioned, “Overall, the state of the nation's education system is as revealing as it is worrying” (p. 15). It further added that there is a system-wide concern over the education system's effectiveness in imparting value and moral education to help form desired behaviour in children. Subsequently, Young et al. (2009), studying Bhutan's quality of student learning suggested that “the need to improve education quality has become a priority for education policy makers and reforms in the country and there is widespread public concern over a perceived decline in education quality” (p. 1). Most recently, the National Council Education Review Committee (2016), carrying out a study on the quality of education have found a number of issues including curriculum that need the government's attention. They found the school curriculum heavy and textbooks and subjects contained irrelevant content and information borrowed from other foreign contexts. Irrelevant and uninteresting curriculum appears to be one of the factors that contribute to school dropout while teacher quality is perceived as one of the other factors.

#### 2.4.2. *Teacher Quality*

While a nation's education system is crucial in the delivery of quality education to its citizens, there is now increased policy shifts focusing on policy issues and strategies related to the promotion of quality of teachers for effective teaching and learning (Ning et al. 2010). Thus, while a number of factors directly or indirectly contribute to school dropout, teacher is an important factor. According to Sabates et al. (2010), and Rumberger (2001), and evidence from the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), studies in Africa, pointed to teacher quality and teacher attitudes as determining students' likelihood of dropping out or remaining in school. Additionally, analysis of education reforms from the OECD countries show that most efficient and effective policies are student centered and teacher capacity building (OECD, 2015).

A study by iDiscoveri Education and the REC (2009) found teacher quality in Bhutan requires enhancement, stating that content knowledge and pedagogical capability needs great improvement. Furthermore, in a survey carried out by Young et al. (2009) on quality learning of school children in Bhutan, it was reported that due to low teacher motivation, there is high teacher absenteeism and poor teacher activity affecting the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The above findings seem to confirm the study of Choden et al. (2014) that students are likely to drop out if they find their classroom environment not conducive enough for learning and if they believe that what they learn is meaningless.

Likewise, teacher attitude is another factor as drop out students interviewed by Choden et al. (2014) said that they dropped out of school because it was demoralising for them when teachers looked down at them as low performing students. Similarly, Jamtsho (2004), studying the attitude of teachers in

lower secondary schools, found that teachers were more authoritarian and they adopted a teacher centred approach while dealing with students. This, he observed, was consistent with the cultural and societal norms expected of a teacher in Bhutan where student discipline plays a crucial role.

#### **2.4.3. School Discipline**

School discipline policy and practice are known to have contributed to student dropout. Rules on school discipline, such as irregular attendance and misbehaviour, lead to transfer, suspension or expulsion from school, forcing students to drop out involuntarily (Rumberger, 2001). For example, the zero-tolerance policy in the US, although initially introduced as a part of a comprehensive preventive programme had been ineffective, because schools had focused only on the disciplinary aspect and neglected the preventive aspect of the programme (Nelson, Gagnon, Jolivette, Sprague, & Scott, 2008).

A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) stated that the intentions of schools to promote a safe school environment through an effective discipline policy, ended up creating more problems by adopting the wrong strategies. Schools with high rates of suspension and expulsion have low rates of good school environment inviting more troubles of misbehaviours (Mathis, 2013). Cumbo and Burden (2012) also categorically expressed that widespread suspension and expulsion of students from school without consideration for due processes have been counterproductive pushing students out of school instead of encouraging them to continue attending school. Jarjoura (1993) found that school dropout due to expulsion led to increased thefts and selling drugs.

In Bhutan, the Education Ministry's zero tolerance policy introduced in 2012 and implemented by

all schools throughout the country to minimize growing student anti-social behaviours is yet to see any concrete results. According to the study by Choden et al. (2014), the zero-tolerance discipline policy does not seem to be working well with increasing discipline cases and one bad effect on expelled students is that they cannot get enrolment in any other school. This is because a school expelling a student issues a school leaving certificate along with a character certificate with negative remarks on them. As a result, other schools do not accept an expelled student (see Appendix F: 30<sup>th</sup> education policy guidelines and instructions 2012).

Schools in the country impose three types of sanctions depending on the severity of offences, from fines/penalties to report/detention to expulsion/transfer. Although the Education Ministry's discipline policy of expulsion is kept as the last resort out of the three-prong penalties, students, once expelled could remain as dropouts throughout their life, with very little opportunity to improve their SES when they have no second chance for schooling (Choden et al., 2014).

Thus, as stated by Moffitt (1993), such young people, who may fall into the lifelong offending category, do not seem to have any other options. This zero-tolerance policy needs to be reviewed and reconsidered as students are criminalised instead of providing them with much needed support. Filing a case at the court is certainly not going to help a child. On the contrary, according to Cumbo and Burden (2012), the discipline policy should ensure that it is compassionate and effective and contains restorative strategies and practices.

#### **2.4.4. Grade Retention**

Grade retention is another primary factor for school dropout; this occurs when children are held



back in the same grade (DuPont et al., 2013). Sabates et al. (2010) stated that when a student repeats in the same grade, he/she becomes overage, contributing to school dropout. While studies have shown that grade retention has been one of the factors for school dropout, there is nothing a student can do about it; as Rumberger and Lamb (2003) put it, the decision to drop out may be driven by factors related to systemic flaws rather than factors inherent to dropouts themselves. Also, Hunter and May (2003) and Boyle, Brock, Mace and Sibbons (2002) stated that in half of the African countries more than 1 student out of 10 repeat grades which is one of the major factors for dropout.

In this context, Balfanz and Legters (2004) stated that schools with powers to promote students to the next higher grade have fewer dropouts. Consequently, the study by the OECD (2015) and the European Commission (2013) also provided policy recommendations, that macro level policies should remove all possible hurdles within a school setting, which might obstruct children from graduating high school and hinder movements between grades.

| The four East Asian education systems of Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Shanghai are in the process of policy reforms not to depend solely on test scores to assess students' learning outcomes. Instead, according to Zhao (2015), these four education systems, although traditionally dependent on excessive use of testing in education have now realized the risks of over testing students. Since the 1990s they have introduced policy reforms to reduce academic testing. When promotions to the next higher grades are based on examinations in these systems, students who fail grades are compelled to repeat.

The case is similar in Bhutan where students have to pass examinations for promotion to the next higher grades, contributing to school dropout. The rate of repetition stood at 8.5% per grade annually on

average, indicating those children do not master the curriculum. This is an indication that the system is not working well, when there is high level of repetition resulting in dropout (ESRC, 2008). A study by IBE- UNESCO (2004) also pointed out that about 87% of students completing primary education, that is grade 6 go on to attend the next higher grade while the others either repeat or dropout. Consequently, as stated in the Annual Education Statistics (2016), the annual average repetition rate from pre-primary to grade 10 for the academic year 2015 stood at 7% because of examinations. The grade repetition results to students becoming average and ultimately dropping out of school.

According to Hadzimichalis (2013), as grade retention is measured as a failure of the education system in terms of poor student performance, grade retention has to be a short-term policy but use of long-term intervention strategies as a comprehensive reform framework has to be initiated at the macro policy level for promotion of students to the next grade. Hence, while school characteristics are important school dropout factors, so are the societal characteristics.

## ***2.5. Societal Characteristics***

The societal characteristics such socio-economic status (SES), poverty, family background, child labour and migration have been extensively studied and are well documented in the research literature as contributing to students dropping out of school. It has been found that students from low SES, poverty, disturbed family backgrounds, engagement in child labour and family migration are more likely to drop out.

### **2.5.1. Socio-economic Status**

Societal characteristic such as the SES of a family, parents' education, occupational status and income are directly correlated with school dropout (Mathis, 2013; Sabates et al., 2010; Tidwell, 1988; Witte et al., 2013a). Educated parents are more likely to be economically viable, indicating a greater ability to invest in their children's education (Choden & Sarkar, 2013; Coleman, 1988). Thus, family income is another reason for school dropout due to parents not being able to support their children's schooling. If parents are unemployed, there is disparity in family income (Hunt, 2008; Witte et al., 2013a).

Parental educational expectation as well as their level of education also plays an important role in inspiring a child to remain in school by providing a cognitive environment for their children's learning (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Coleman, 1988; DuPont et al., 2013; Witte et al., 2013a). For instance, Rumberger and Lamb (2003) found in the US and Australia that dropout rates of students in the families with high social status and higher education level was lower. Similarly, Sabates et al. (2010) also found that parents with some kind of schooling or formal education have great influence on their children's academic performance which is a likely proposition to prevent families from falling into intergenerational poverty.

### **2.5.2. Poverty**

Poverty is one of the most important and common factors for school dropout (Tidwell, 1988). Literature has indicated that children from poverty-stricken families are not able to afford their schooling. According to Hunt (2008), students also drop out of school because they cannot afford

indirect expenses involved in schooling. Direct cost includes school fees which are borne by the government in some countries, while indirect costs such as uniforms, text books and stationery, travel, food, and examination fees are a big financial burden to poor families. Poverty is one of the main factors for school dropout in Bhutan (Choden et al.2014; Dorji, 2005; Education Sector Review Commission, 2008; Subedi & Nepal, 2012). The Royal Education Council (REC) (2012) also found in their study conducted in 2004 that the enrolment rate from poor families stood at 57.7% while those from rich or better-off families stood at 76.8%.

Although, education is free in Bhutan up to basic education level (10<sup>th</sup> Grade), indirect costs have put extra financial burden on the families of the poorer section of the society and their school going children. The Education Sector Review Commission (2008) stated that families have to bear costs of uniforms, food, fees and other contributions, which are factors for school dropout. Likewise, according to Choden et al. (2014), 21% of the dropout children interviewed in Bhutan said that they could not afford to continue their study, due to poverty while the Asian Development Bank and National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan (2013) found 26% of children between the ages 6–16 years in urban areas do not attend school because of an affordability problem.

Similarly, Subedi and Nepal (2010) found that the factor for both boys and girls dropping out of school is the inability of parents to bear the schooling costs; they found the net enrollment rates by poverty to be at 69.2% of the poor children enrolled at primary school level and only 2.7% at secondary level in 2007. This finding suggests that as children go up the grades, the burden to educate them becomes challenging for families with likely dropout of school occurring.

### **2.5.3. Family Factors**

Family is an important factor that is capable of developing a child and making him/her graduate successfully as home provides the pivotal foundation for a child to achieve academic success in school as well as providing better experiences later in life (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Lack of family or parental support or involvement is crucial in preventing children from dropping out of school irrespective of family income (Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005).

Subsequently, Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson (2000) stated that parental involvement and encouragement have been found to be effective. According to Rumberger and Lim (2008), a series of parenting practices, sometimes referred to as “social resources or social capital”, such as high parental aspiration for their children’s education; constantly monitoring their children’s progress in school; communicating with the school and knowing the parents of their children’s friends are strong practices in reducing dropouts.

Studies have also shown that children from large families with five or more siblings have proven to be disadvantageous in children’s graduation prospects (Dustman & van Soest, 2007; Lamb et al., 2004). A student’s behaviour to drop out is also influenced by a sibling who has already dropped out (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Therefore, emotional bonding between the parents and children are strong determinants in school dropout (Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2005).

According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006); and Lamb et al. (2004), children from single parents are also more likely to drop out of school; as do children with step parents (Lamb et al., 2004; Plank et al., 2008). That is why; students living with both parents are more likely to graduate in comparison to students living with other family members or other arrangements (Bhutan Council for

School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA), 2013; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In some cases, there is also children-parental conflict which needs to be resolved. According to Santrock (2004) adolescents tend to rebel against parents because of a number of factors such as “biological changes of puberty, cognitive changes involving increased idealism and logical reasoning, social changes focused on independence and identity, maturational changes in parents, and expectations that are violated by parents and adolescents” (p. 411).

Family factors are also associated with individual interactions that take place with other family members who live both inside or outside the home (Kattan & Szekely, 2015). The study by Rumberger and Lim (2008) further added that a child’s attitude and motivation to drop out is also influenced by the personal interactions with his parents and family situation. For instance, stressful family events such as illness, death, adults entering and leaving the household and marital disruptions increase the chances of dropout.

According to Pufall et al. (2015), children also drop out of school when they become orphans and there is no one to look after them due to parental loss. As articulated by Smiley et al. (2013), orphans can be classified into a range of categories such as double orphans, children who have lost both their parents; paternal orphans, those who have lost their fathers and maternal orphans, those who have lost their mothers. The most common definition, however, is when children have lost one or both their parents.

Smiley et al. (2013) also found in their study that orphans were found to be repeating grades more often than non-orphans and becoming over-age over the time which led to school dropout. In addition, when faced with a challenge or difficulty, non-orphans were likely to repeat a grade while orphans were

more likely to drop out of school.

Research has shown that having an environment in the family and community conducive to learning plays an important role in school retention of students. The upbringing of a child depends on a family, while what type of environment a child lives in, is important, as some communities are prone to commit crimes and serve as bad examples for children (McGee, Wickes, Corcoran, Bor & Najman, 2011). They found that the neighbourhood of the community within which a child lives, is a predictor for dropout and anti-social behaviour. Mathis (2013) also found that students are exposed to risk behaviours outside the school in the community with only a 20% dropout variance controlled by schools. Outside school factors such as socio- economic conditions of family and community, peer influence, community environment, child labour and so on are indicators of external factors for dropout (Rumberger, 1983).

#### **2.5.4. *Child Labour***

Child labour or working illegally is one of the factors for school dropout as children work as child labourers to earn extra income during or after school hours (Rumberger, 2001). According to Hunt (2008) and Tidwell (1988), the most predominant kinds of child labour in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are related to domestic works, being household chores for girls and agriculture work for boys; this contributes to family income but leads to school dropout. According to Witte et al. (2013a), there is a debate among scholars as to whether or not students should work. Some are of the view that disadvantaged students should not be discouraged from working; however, research is still yet to ascertain whether work increases or decreases a student's likelihood of dropping out of school. However, Witte et al. (2013a), advised that policy should ensure that students are not allowed to take up

an adult's job before attaining 16 years of age.

In Bhutan, child labour seems to be occurring on a large scale as confirmed by the Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (2010); Chhetri (2011); the National Commission for Women and Children (2009) and RENEW (2015). According to the Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (2010), 18.4 percent of children between ages 5 - 14 were working as child labourers based on the child labour definition used by the UNICEF.

UNICEF (2014) pointed out that as education in Bhutan is not compulsory, parents can withhold their children from enrolment in school or have their children drop out of school as per their needs, which have implications on child labour and retention. The study by Dorji (2005) found one of the prominent reasons for dropout was that the child/ren was needed at home for labour/work, impairing the child's future life permanently and their aspiration for academic achievement.

#### **2.5.5. Migration**

Alongside child labour as a school dropout factor, Gosai and Sulewski (2014), studying the migratory trend in Bhutan, have pointed out that rural to urban migration is a serious problem when villages are abandoned. Internal migration from rural to urban areas is a phenomenon associated largely with developing countries as a response to development and modernisation moving from agriculture-based economy to service and industrial based economy according to Gosai and Sulewski (2014). Therefore, dropout happens when families move to urban centres looking for greener pastures and better economic opportunities. For instance, in Ghana, Ananga (2013) stated that parents migrated with their children even before school holidays began while in some cases, children independently migrated



seasonally to work in other communities, resulting in school dropout. The study by Pufall et al. (2015) also revealed that migration was an important risk factor for dropping out of school especially between students of aged 6 – 18 years. Further, they discovered that children who migrated longer distances were at greater risk of dropping out of school.

In Bhutan, according to Gosai and Sulewski (2014), rural to urban migration is taking place because of so called ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. The ‘push’ factors in rural areas are: lack of education facilities (46%), lack of job opportunities (17%), inadequate infrastructure and service facilities (15%) and small land holdings (7%). In terms of pull factors, the main reason for migration was because towns and cities provided more opportunities for employment (33%). They also mentioned that families migrate to urban areas due to poverty in rural Bhutan as 70% of the population still live-in far-flung villages.

## **2.6. Summary**

This chapter provided a review of literature relevant to the present study. School dropout is a complex and multi-faceted problem that is not easily resolved. There is no single cause of school dropout. Drop out is often a process rather than the result of one single event, and hence has more than one proximate cause (Hunt, 2008). As school dropout is a complex problem with multiple dimensions, this chapter looked at personal characteristics, school characteristics and societal characteristics as factors for school dropout in relation to how macro-level policies and system level issues influence student retention and school dropout.

Analysis of research has shown that student engagement in the forms of policy interventions and other intervention strategies at the individual, family and school levels play huge roles in student retention. While this chapter shed light on the research of the dropout problem and factors that cause students to drop, supplementary research could further explain the dropout problem. In the next chapter information gathered from the review of literature will be used and the researcher builds upon the investigation with the explanation of the study. Hence, Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that underpins the current study.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### ***3.1. Introduction***

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodological procedures in order to provide sufficient information to undertake the current qualitative study. According to Ritchie and Spencer (1994, 2002), over the last few decades, there has been considerable increase in the use of qualitative methods in applied social policy research. They stated that “qualitative research is now used to explore and understand a diversity of social and public policy issues...” (p. 305). They added that qualitative methods are widely used for a number of reasons determined by the social policy fields in understanding complex behaviours and different needs, systems and cultures. For this exploratory qualitative research study, individual interview was adopted as the methodology for data collection.

The chapter begins with the research questions and conceptualisation of the research questions followed by the research design and strategies included. This explanation leads into a description of recruitment of participants and sections addressing data analysis and ethical consideration.

### ***3.2. Research Questions***

At the centre of the methodology are the research questions to explore and guide the study. Although the research questions are already stated in Chapter 1, they are restated here to emphasise their importance. The research questions that guided the study start with a preamble followed by four questions.

### **3.2.1. Preamble**

Bhutan has significant issues with respect to poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, school dropout and anti-social behaviour.

### **3.2.2. Questions**

1. Do existing top-level policies recognise the issues of poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment and anti-social behaviour in relation to school dropout?
2. Are existing educational policies appropriate for a nation with these issues, according to Bhutanese policy makers?
3. Are there alternative policies which might better address the issues or is it possible to suggest which of the policies might have the most impact?
4. How does policy in Bhutan impact upon student retention and dropout from the perspectives of policy makers and legislators?

### **3.3. Conceptualisation of the Key Research Questions**

In the past decade or so, school dropout in Bhutan has become an increasingly disturbing problem, requiring urgent attention from policymakers. Generally speaking, while school dropout is attributed to individual, institutional and societal factors, it is not known in Bhutan as to what specific factors contribute to school dropout and how macro policy measures and mandates could help in student retention. Consequences of school dropout are to self, family and others, as well as one major risk factor, anti-social behaviours (e.g. substance abuse, criminal activities and misdemeanours). The study explored

the perspectives of the policy makers of the likely association between school dropout and anti-social behaviours.

### ***3.4. Design of the Research Approach***

Two methods for data collection were used for the study: interviews for primary data and documentary review for secondary data. This occurred to enhance the validity and reliability of the data so as to meet the requirements of the study.

#### ***3.4.1. Primary Data: Interviews***

To explore the research questions, the study used individual interviews with five Cabinet Ministers, Royal Government of Bhutan. The strength of the qualitative interviews lies in the generation of enough data as it allows in-depth discussions with participants to respond to the same set of questions. As exploratory research suggests, according to Stebbins (2001), it is a broad ranging and purposive study aimed at looking at a problem, developing theory from the data and arriving at generalisations leading to descriptions and understanding of the problem. An exploratory research project is a study into a hypothetical or theoretical idea, where a researcher has observed a problem and seeks to understand more about it. In this context, it was appropriate to study the problem of school dropout through the lenses of policy makers, especially, when the problem has uncertainty and is not well understood due to very little existing literature (Wyk, 2012).

In line with this methodology, although the participants for this interview comprised of only five participants, it was decided that they would be in a good position to provide valuable insights into the

problem by answering the research questions and also generate enough data for the study (Patton, 2002). The researcher approached each individual participant and mutually convenient dates and venues were fixed for the interviews. Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan was convenient for the participants as they all resided in the city.

Participants took part in individual interviews for approximately 45 minutes to an hour each. As the participants consisted of high-profile people, the whole interview process was managed professionally by the researcher. The interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the participants. The researcher ensured that a best quality play-back tape recorder with good quality speakers and high concentration was used to capture the best possible voices. The researcher also made sure that extra equipment was also arranged in case a tape broke down during the interview. If anything went wrong, there was no way the researcher could get another appointment for the interview as participants were very busy.

#### **3.4.2. *Secondary Data: Documentary Review***

As a secondary data collection method, public records and government policy documents, annual reports and statistics and strategic plans were reviewed for seeking the necessary information to suit this study. The review primarily focused and dealt with the selection of the documents produced in Bhutan and directly related to the study. In view of the limitations of documents itself, a major contribution might have been hindered. Nevertheless, the policy documents were used to their optimum level in supporting the interviews as well as refuting against the individual perspectives of the participants. Although the selection of documents was based on wide ranging materials, focus has been made on

quality rather than quantity and have tried to avoid subjectivity of authors and personal biases (Bowen, 2009). The following are the documents used for the study as supplementary data (Table 3.1)

Table 3.1

Classification of the documents considered as secondary data sources according to the role they played in this thesis.

Provision of contextual information	Provision of statistical data relevant to study	Central to the analysis and interpretation of interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bhutan 2020 Part II (1999)</li> <li>• Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency (2014)</li> <li>• National Commission for Women and Children (2009)</li> <li>• Operational Guidelines for Central Schools (2014)</li> <li>• Policy and Planning Division (2011)</li> <li>• Policy and Planning Division (2012)</li> <li>• RENEW Bhutan (2015)</li> <li>• Royal Education Council (REC) (2012)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Education Statistics Reports (2014 &amp; 2016)</li> <li>• Ministry of Finance (2016)</li> <li>• National HRD Advisory Series (2015)</li> <li>• National Statistics Yearbook of Bhutan (2013 &amp; 2014)</li> <li>• Population and Housing Census (2005)</li> <li>• Bhutan Poverty Control Agency (2014)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014)</li> <li>• Education Sector Review Commission (ESRC). (2008)</li> <li>• Labour &amp; Employment Act (2007)</li> <li>• Ministry of Labour &amp; Human Resources (2015)</li> <li>• National Council Education Review Committee (2016)</li> <li>• National Employment Policy (2013)</li> <li>• National Employment Policy (2012)</li> <li>• National Youth Policy (NYP) (2011)</li> <li>• Rural Enterprise Development Corporation Limited (2017)</li> <li>• Teacher Human Resource Policy (2014)</li> </ul>

This method was necessary due to the fact that some information might not be attained through other the other method i.e. interviews. Documentary review was a very useful method because it helped the researcher to support primary data. Even the literature was used extensively to support the primary data wherever required.

### ***3.4.3. Interviews: Questions***

A total of nine interview questions (Appendix E) were developed for the individual interviews that largely generated from the literature review related to individual characteristics, societal characteristics and school characteristics along with policy issues. The main purposes of the individual interviews were to answer the research questions and also to find out the following:

- the factors contributing to school dropout;
- the association between school dropout and antisocial behaviours; and
- the effects of macro level policies and interventions provided to schools.

### ***Interview Questions***

The following questions were asked of each person interviewed:

1. Why do you think children are dropping out of schools in significant numbers, despite the government providing them free education?
2. Does Bhutan have a definition of school dropout to clearly constitute what dropout really means in the Bhutanese context? How should Bhutan define school dropout in your opinion?



3. Is the present school curriculum adequate enough to prepare students for their life afterschool?
4. Do you think Bhutanese teachers are motivated enough in their teaching profession? Why do you think Bhutanese teachers are leaving the education system at the moment in large numbers?
5. Do you think school dropout is associated with anti-social behaviours? How can these be understood in terms of policy and systemic support rendered to schools?
6. What is the impact of the zero-tolerance policy introduced in schools? Does it contribute effectively in helping improve students' behaviour or otherwise does it have an adverse effect?
7. What could be done to bring back youth with anti-social behaviours, without formal training or basic education to mainstream society?
8. What policies or programs could be put in place to increase retention and decrease anti- social behaviours?
9. What political and economic conditions drive or hinder education policy reforms and its implementation?

Although, the personal interview was structured with predetermined questions, the interviewer had a room to add questions based on the context of the participants' responses. Guided by the interview questions, the interview was conducted in the form of flexible conversations and dialogue between the interviewer and the participants with probing and intervention wherever required.

### ***3.5. Sampling Method: Recruitment of Participants***

A homogeneous and purposive sample recruitment comprising five Cabinet Ministers was

undertaken, with their full consent (Appendix C) sought beforehand in line with Steinberg (2004) and Liamputtong (2013). A personal invitation was extended by the researcher meeting each of the participants (Appendix A) along with the participant information sheet (Appendix B) and participant consent form (Appendix C). All participants were made aware that participation in the interview was going to be purely voluntary and any information provided by them including their identity would be kept confidential. As participants were deliberately selected from the five Ministries responsible for policy making processes, they were expected to offer insights into the macro level policy issues and system level support given to schools (Patton, 2002). The total probable participants as per the following list were interviewed:

The Minister of Education/the Minister of Economic Affairs

The Minister of Labour and Human Resources

The Minister for Agriculture and Forests

The Minister for Housing and Human Settlement

The Minister for Information and Communications

### ***3.6. Data Analysis***

Data analysis is divided into two sub-sections: Primary data analysis of interviews and secondary data analysis of documentary review.

#### ***3.6.1. Analysis of Interviews***

Usually, the whole purpose of analysis, description and interpretation of qualitative data revolves

around the intended study which provides context for making meanings out of the data and also building a story about the sample (Steinberg, 2004). The process of analysis followed and employed methods consistent with the research design. The process of data collection was purposive sampling. Qualitative coding methods were used to make sense of the data, identify significant patterns and build a framework to communicate what the data revealed. The following paragraph presents the exact techniques used to analyze the data.

After the tape-recorded interviews, the raw data were verbatim typed, posted to a computer database, printed out and read and also listened to the tape again with a focus to identify themes or concepts emerging from the data. Emergence of themes for each question was considered and quotes were used to illustrate salient points. Once the conceptual codes were identified, the coding processes started.

First, the study analysed the coding process through initial coding. This type of coding was chosen to examine, compare and search for similarities and differences throughout the data (Ganapathy, 2016). The second level coding chosen was pattern coding which provided the basis to explain major themes underneath the segments of the data, causes and explanations to the possible phenomenon, and finally, the platform to construct frameworks and processes (Ganapathy, 2016). Later, analysis of the data took place by comparing and contrasting results of the individual interviews.

This research study followed Creswell's (2009) six steps during the data analysis process:

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis (p.185). During this step, the researcher reviewed audio tapes from interviews and transferred into word document transcripts.

Step 2: Read through the data (p.185). To get to know the data, the researcher reflected on the

overall meaning to gain a general sense of the information and ideas that the participants conveyed.

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with the coding process (p. 186). In this step, the researcher followed Creswell's procedure of organizing the material into segments by taking the text data and segmenting sentences into categories. Then those categories were labeled with terms based on the actual language from the participants.

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories for these for analysis. (p. 189). Next, the researcher used this process to generate codes for the descriptions, which then led to generalizing a small number of categories or themes. Then, the themes were analyzed as they emerged and gathered the various cases into a general description for this bounded case.

Step 5: Advance how the description of the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative (p. 189). For this step, the researcher wove the emergent themes into narrative passages, so that the findings emerged logically from the participants' responses.

Step 6: Interpret the meaning of the data (p. 189). Creswell recognizes that a researcher's own background plays just as important a part of the meaning making process as a researcher's fidelity to a theoretical lens. Because of the researcher's experience in school administration, it was fairly easy to understand the participants' stories during the interpretation process. Also, to convey the participants' perceptions of their experiences accurately, the researcher focused specifically on what they were saying, the conclusions they drew, and their intentions for future policy reforms and practice. The themes that emerged from this study came directly from the researcher's awareness of the healthy tension between his own biases and the participants' own meaning-making processes.

### **3.6.2. Documentary data analysis**

Document analysis was used as my secondary method of data collection and analysis. Interviews, as discussed above was the primary method. Some of these documents were discovered through following leads produced from the interviews and literature review. These documents are referred to as secondary or supplementary documents because these documents gave additional context to each of the three dimensions of the conceptual framework.

Document analysis as a qualitative research method is a significant research technique, and is an important part of most triangulation schemes in combining methodologies to study a single phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Validating findings through different methods may reduce bias by verifying information gathered. This is exactly what has been done in this study to cross check the authenticity of the individual perspectives of the participants. Even O’Leary (2014) suggested to consider two main issues before starting document analysis: the issue of biasness, both in the author or creator of the document as well as the researcher.

Overall 24 documents were obtained in hard copies and also retrieved online distinguishing them into six categories: (i) Educational and National Statistics to obtain annual statistics of school dropout and other figures; (ii) Education and government policy documents to gather information on school dropout, teacher quality, youth behaviour, finance and unemployment; (iii) Government Acts in relation to child labour and abuse; (iv) Surveys and reports on poverty, substances abuse, school standards and quality of education; (v) Guidelines for Central Schools and School discipline (appendix F) and (v) Reports of NGOs based in Bhutan in relation to issues on vulnerable children, youth and women.

The method of data analysis involved descriptive and evaluative coding of relevant documents

associated with the study. With conceptual framework as an initial starting point, the data was organized and coded in relation to three dimensions of the conceptual framework. With the progress of the coding, codes were categorized that were similar, putting them into groups that logically fitted together. Working with these categories and groupings, Owen's (2013) analytical memo writing technique was used while searching for relevant information which led to a deeper understanding of the experiences, history, challenges, and changes connected to the study.

### ***3.7. Limitations***

Although this research was carefully conducted under strict supervision, it still has its limitations and shortcomings. Limitations are the restrictions in the study over which the researcher has hardly any control (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). This study had the following limitations. Firstly, the sample size in this study was small ( $N = 5$ ). A larger sample size inclusive of all 10 Cabinet Ministers would have been desirable. Secondly, as the participants were very busy and they could not allot more than an hour for the interview. This time factor has been a disadvantage, although, enough data has been generated for the study. Thirdly, the accuracy of the findings is limited by the subjective opinions and personal impressions obtained through the interviews of the policy makers. Fourthly, the participants' ability to remember experiences, attitudes, and feelings may have been a limiting factor, with likely result of inaccurate or incorrect information. Fifthly, they may have been reluctant to say something that they thought their government might disapprove of or that would make them appear defensive and bad. Sixth, due to the selective or purposive sampling techniques, the results from the study cannot be generalized beyond the participants under study.

Finally, the selection of documents as a secondary data had limitations in its quality, quantity, accessibility and sparseness in case of Bhutan. As pointed by Bowen (2009), one of the foremost concerns is “to consider initial concern is that documents are not created with data research agendas and therefore require some investigative skills.” Further, selected documents did not provide complete information necessary to answer the research questions and in some cases none at all while some were incomplete and inconsistent. Therefore, Bowen (2013) cautioned that it is imperative to evaluate the quality of documents and the researcher has to be prepared to face some challenges or gaps when carrying out document analysis.

Therefore, to substantiate the study from what policy makers have said, future study could take up an empirical study, seeking the views of principals, teachers, students and parents from across the country. This would fill the research gap as there is lack of prior research on the topic in Bhutan.

### ***3.8. Data Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the value of truth of a piece of research (Holloway, 1997). Qualitative research is trustworthy when it reflects the reality and ideas of the participants. The purpose of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support the argument that the inquiry’s results are valid, ensuring that the data collected and analyzed are as accurate as possible. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is important to evaluating its worth and it is based on the following four elements:

- ***Credibility - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings***

The researcher sought to use a couple of avenues to check results and create an in-depth

understanding of the phenomena. For instance, the researcher was able to validate data through cross verification of the facts and figures of the results from government policy documents and statistical reports. Moreover, after the verbatim transcription was completed, the transcripts were shown to the participants for validation. As a result, the data presented as a part of this research is believable, credible, and trustworthy. To ensure transferability the researcher also presented the historical context of the researched area.

- ***Transferability - showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts***

The obligation for demonstrating transferability in a study like this belongs to the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher has enhanced transferability by thoroughly describing the research context. Although, the study is focused on school dropout in Bhutan, it may be transferable and generalised to other contexts.

- ***Dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated***

Dependability is important to trustworthiness because it establishes the research study's findings is consistent and repeatable. The researcher ensured that the findings were consistent with the raw data collected by having an external researcher looked at it for his feedback and comments and also to confirm the accuracy of the findings.

- ***Confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.***

Confirmability is the last criterion of Trustworthiness that a qualitative researcher must establish. This criterion has to do with the level of confidence that the research study's findings are based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher biases. Confirmability



is there to verify that the findings were shaped by participants more so than they were shaped by the researcher. Thus, the researcher has ensured confirmability of the findings by describing the research process as transparent as possible by clearly describing how data were collected and analyzed using the audit trail (Given, 2008) in Appendix G.

### ***3.9. Researcher Positionality***

One important distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is the role the researcher plays in the process. It is clear that the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative study research is the researcher herself or himself. As a researcher progresses through the research process, the researcher must acknowledge he or she is a human instrument and the primary research tool. As such, it is imperative for researchers to consider their own biases, limitations, and views—throughout data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the reporting phases of the process. Qualitative research assumes that the researcher's biases and values impact the outcome of any study in relation to the subject, participants, context and process of research (Merriam, 1998).

Therefore, positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the participants or contexts in terms of their lens, relevant research beliefs and any possible influence the researcher might have in the research process. The researcher's years of experience in educational profession as a teacher, headmaster, principal and district education officer was an advantage while interviewing the participants as the researcher could discuss policy issues and field practices rather well. However, as the researcher prepared to conduct personal interviews with the Cabinet Ministers in which the researcher sought to engage them in frank discussions about policy issues and systemic practices, the researcher expected that

his position as a former staff of the Parliament Secretariat would aid him in connecting well with the participants. Such expectations would seem reasonable. The researcher's own preconceived notions about the importance of his positionality were reversed through the collecting of data. Although, the researcher knew almost all the participants personally (being a tiny nation with a small population, almost everybody knows everybody), not all the participants were forth coming in freely expressing their views. They were most of the time hesitant and defended their government position especially while discussing policy issues. Nevertheless, their views and perspectives were sought and heard. Consequently, the researcher might have taken his positionality for granted in attempting to engage Cabinet Ministers in discussions of policy matters.

In regard to documentary data collection, as expressed earlier, there was tremendous constraint in finding adequate and quality documents as the research in Bhutan is at its infancy and at times its accessibility is restricted due to various reasons. Reflecting on, fleshing out, and conveying the positionality of the researcher is critical to ensuring the validity of one's research stance. However, nobody may be 100% objective. In fact, even the most passive methods of data collection and quantitative analysis have some flaws, and it is impossible to absolutely control for and ensure the unobtrusiveness of research applications and interventions. Nevertheless, the researcher's beliefs, values systems, and moral postures are as essentially present and inseparable from the research process as the researcher's physical and virtual presence, facilitating and participating in the research project. As it is the ethical duty, the researcher has tried his best to intentionally and mindfully attend to any irregularities and biasness, cross checking the facts and figures before they are incorporated in to this study.

### ***3.10. Ethical Considerations***

The issue of ethical consideration was a high priority for this study. Participation in the study was voluntary and their consent to take part in the study was duly sought with full disclosure of the broad context of the study. They were provided with information letters (Appendix B) and also made to read and sign consent forms (Appendix C). Participants were advised of their right to confidentiality and privacy and of their right to discontinue in the study process if they wished to do so.

| There was no safety issue involved to both the researcher and participants as the topic under study was of national significance without any bias or prejudice against any individual, community or organisation. Participants comprised of five Cabinet Ministers and interviews took place in mutually convenient venues and dates. The interview was held entirely in the English language. There was no language barrier as the participants were highly proficient in the language. Most importantly, the ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee of the University of Tasmania for minimal risk, well before the data collection occurred (Appendix D).

## **PART B: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **CHAPTER 4: SCHOOL DROPOUT**

#### ***4.1. Introduction***

Part B is divided into four chapters: (i) School Dropout, (ii) School Issues, (iii) School Dropout and Anti-social Behaviour and (iv) Potential Policy Moves which contain results and discussions. The purpose of Part B was to delve into the results of the study and discuss the findings as perceived by five members of the Cabinet Ministers in context to the relevant literature. Note that the words of the Cabinet Ministers are italicised for ease of recognising them. The participants were policy makers and were purposively selected to participate in the study as their perspectives are likely to be central to current and future policy decisions regarding factors that they believe to be critical to school dropout in Bhutan. Thus, their viewpoints could not be taken as necessarily reflecting empirical associations between the identified factors and school dropout. In addition, their viewpoints are supplemented by some documentary reviews and evidences.

Chapter 4 defines school dropout to fit into the Bhutanese context and the terms such as ‘economic conditions’ and ‘poverty’ are explained and defined as two separate entities although these two terms appear similar.

#### ***4.2. Definition of School Dropout***

In Bhutan, despite school dropout becoming a growing problem, there is lack of clarity as to what constitutes school dropout as the policy makers have not come to terms with the school dropout problem

as yet. This in itself indicates that there is a policy problem as students are free to leave at any time of the school year, without any obligations to the government which is investing heavily in educating each child.

The fact that there is no definition of school dropout is clearly revealed by the various responses of the participants. Two participants were of the opinion that formulating a definition of school dropout was not important as long as the government was aware of the problem. One participant said: *“As long as we are aware of the gravity and seriousness of this problem of school dropout and take concerted efforts to address them, I don’t see the reason to redefine the problem.”* However, he said that if he was to define school dropout, his definition would be *“the generally accepted and understood definition of a school dropout is any pupil or student who does not complete his or her basic school education.”* The second participant said *“I don’t know why you want to look into definition; for us what is important is that people who have studied till grade 10 and grade 12, they must have a meaningful job with them; I don’t know what definition that you are looking at but this is a serious concern with us.”* On the contrary to what the above two participants said, according to the third participant, *“there may be a link between school dropout and anti-social behaviours. That is why a definition of school dropout is important.”*

Despite the fact that a significant number of children leave schools each year, the number looks trivial and could be misleading. Dianda (2008) stated that the price of doing little or nothing about dropout has enormous negative implication, while making investments may have significant benefits. Moreover, according to Kavetuna (2010), to tackle the problem of school dropout, educators and policy makers need to know who is considered a dropout and who is a graduate and at what levels of education and what ages. This is why a definition of school dropout is so crucial in defining the problem and

accordingly formulating intervention strategies for retention.

Subsequently, the third participant said that “*my definition would be grade 12 and below because grade 10 is a basic education level and grade 12 is, may be in-between, to pursuing to university.*”

However, although education is free up to university level, due to stringent screening processes at grade 10, only top performing students are granted scholarships by the government for higher secondary school studies and further on to tertiary education. As a result, students coming from affluent families go for private schools when they don’t qualify for government schools while students coming from poor and economically disadvantaged families usually end up nowhere and also remain unemployed. Thus, there seems to be a confusion as to whether dropout should be defined as students leaving before completion of grade 10 or grade 12 as suggested by one participant. It is debatable and a prerogative of the policy makers based on the national interest and situational requirements.

Yet, the fourth participant was of the opinion that “*...dropouts are those if they have one time attended school but later on left school at any point of time without completion for whatever reasons or circumstances.*” The fifth participant said “*there is no definition as such as of now. However, it is enshrined in our constitution that the children have the constitutional right to basic education. As far as my opinion is concerned, school dropout in Bhutan should be defined as children not completing grade 10.*”

Similar to the different opinions expressed above, the definition of school dropout is unclear and confusing as it seems to differ from one nation to another, depending on the educational structure and circumstances, the needs and purposes and prescribed level of basic education and happens within a certain age group and grades (Dorji, 2005; Dorn, 1996; Hunt, 2008; Rumberger, 2011; Sabates et al.,

2010;). Drewry (2007) described dropout as a percentage of student dropout in any particular given year. According to UNESCO (1984, p.3), “a dropout can be defined as a child who enrolls in school but fails to complete the relevant level of the educational cycle.”

After juxtaposition of the literature and the participant views, the definition contributed by the last participant aptly fits the definition of this study because in Bhutan, basic education comprises of 11 years of free schooling from pre-primary to grade 10. Hence, dropout for this study may be defined as children, who enroll in school, but drop out in a particular given year without a basic education qualification (grade 10) in line with the Constitution of the Kingdom Bhutan (2008); Drewry (2007); UNESCO (1984) and majority views of the participants.

Having defined school dropout for this study, the next section defines ‘socio-economic status’ and ‘poverty’ and looks at the various reasons for students dropping out of schools and includes deliberate in-depth statements from those interviewed.

#### ***4.3. Definitions of ‘Socio-economic Status’ and ‘Poverty’***

Before examining each of the four main reasons for school dropout, it is appropriate that the two terms: Socio-economic status (hereafter SES) and poverty are defined even though they have links to each other and appear similar. Therefore, these two terms are being treated as two different entities for this study based on the definitions of Santrock (2004); UNESCO (2016) and Woolfolk (2007).

According to Santrock (2004), SES is defined as a group of people having similar economic, educational and occupational traits. Likewise, Woolfolk (2007) defines SES as the relative positions held by people in the society based on income, power and background. She adds that there are generally three

levels of SES: low, moderate, and high. Most problems linked with low SES are connected to poverty. That is why poverty is sometimes used as a similar concept to low SES.

In absolute terms, UNESCO (2016) defined poverty in relation to the amount of money required to meet basic necessities such as food, clothes and shelter while relative poverty defines poverty in comparison to the SES of other members of the society. People are considered as poor if they fall below the prevailing standards of living in a given societal context. Similarly, the international standard of extreme poverty is set when people earn less than \$1 a day. Thus, it may be inferred that poverty and SES are treated differently for this study as SES is defined as people living above the poverty line although in varying socio-economic conditions and poverty is defined as people living in absolute poverty without basic necessities and amenities. This leads to the next section which deliberates on results from the study leading to in-depth discussions and analysis.

#### ***4.4. Results and Discussions***

The 121 raw data quotes that emerged from the interviews are classified into three higher order themes: (i) School related issues, (ii) School dropout and anti-social behaviour, and (iii) Potential policy issues. The possible reasons for school dropout according to the Bhutanese policy makers are presented in Figure 2. Data for the study was collected from a small group of participants and in some cases from documentary review, however, the material is adequate enough for an exploratory study, although the findings could not be generalised and needed further studies to authenticate the current findings.

#### ***4.5. Reasons for School Dropout***



This study had two main purposes. The first purpose was to seek perspectives of the Cabinet Ministers to explore the various reasons for school dropout in Bhutan. The second purpose was to provide a vision for what could be done for both retention and dropout as policy reforms. One participant who was taken aback at the school dropout statistics presented to him; he did not think that school dropout was a problem in Bhutan yet. According to the participant:

*Well, I don't know which some studies and national statistics you are referring to but if this is true, it is highly worrying and disconcerting. We need to look at this problem seriously and holistically and adopt appropriate measures to ensure that our youth look forward to going to school and complete their school education successfully. As you know, nothing can ever replace or substitute the importance and value of good quality education in the early formative years of our youth. As you will agree, education still is, one of the highest-return public investments in the world today.*

Interviewing the ministers and gathering their views on school dropout, this study found that there were four major reasons why children are dropping out of schools before completion of basic education i.e. grade 10. These reasons were SES, poverty, family factors and poor academic achievement according to the policy makers (Figure 2). These findings are in line with the previous studies undertaken by Dorji (2005), Education Sector Review Commission (2008), Subedi & Nepal (2010), Choden et al. (2014), although their studies differed in purpose and methodology. These four main reasons for school dropout are further supplemented by sub-reasons which are discussed in the subsequent sub-headings. One of the reasons that evolved strongly from the data was SES and its related

sub-reasons for school dropout.

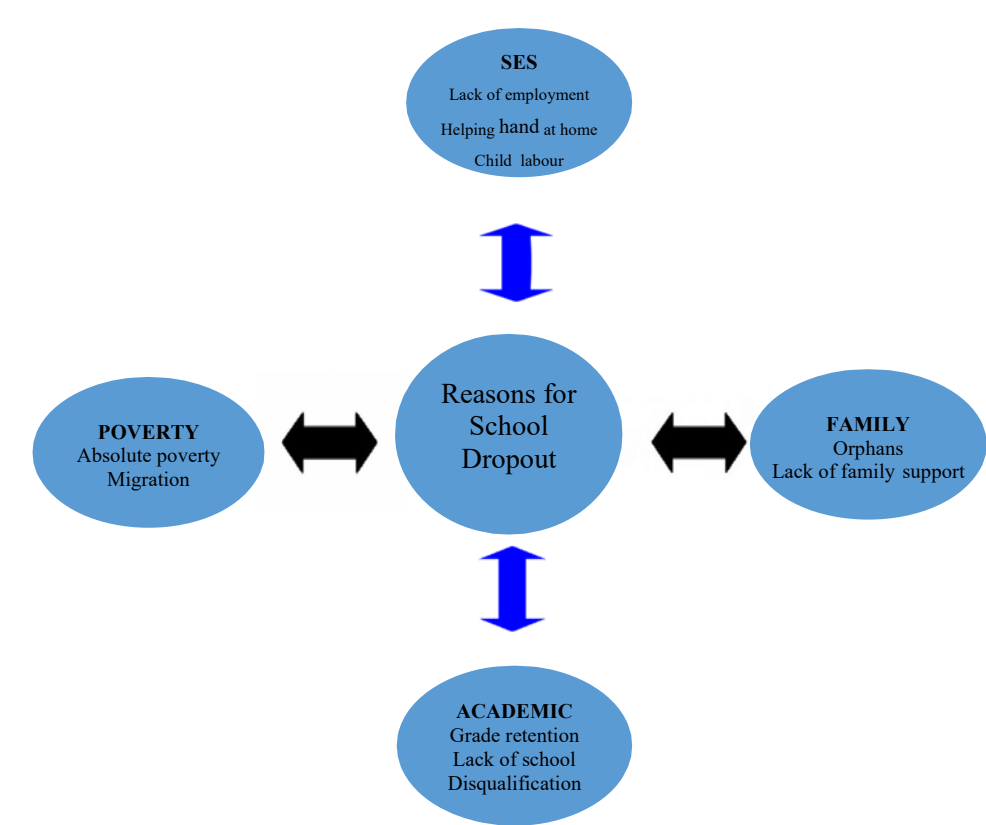


Figure 2. Reasons for school dropout according to Bhutanese policy makers

4.6. Socio-economic status

School dropout reasons attributed to economic conditions that emerged from the data are (i) helping hand needed at home, (ii) lack of employment prospects, and (iv) child labour. Three

participants said that children drop out of school because of the socio-economic status of their parents who come from an economically weak and financially difficult family background. Hence, SES was a prominent reason of school dropout as stated by three of the five participants. One participant emphasized that “*dropout I think is a result of the greater economic transitions that are happening in our country.*” The three economic reasons attributed to dropout are discussed below.

#### **4.6.1. *Helping Hand Needed at Home***

As per the views of the participants, because of financial difficulty and also due to rural to urban migration, there is a shortage of manpower in the rural villages. Looking for better economic gains and opportunities, there is a growing trend of rural to urban migration occurrence in the country, leaving the households uninhabited and agriculture lands remaining fallow. As a result, children too drop out of school to accompany their parents or venture out on their own. This trend certainly is not a good development when about 70% of the Bhutanese people are dependent on subsistence farming (Tobgay, 2006).

In such a labour shortage situation, parents need a helping hand at home and their best bet is their children. For instance, one participant pointed out that “*parents require their children’s helping hand in household chores and agriculture farms which result to school dropout.*” This finding is in line with the study of Dorji (2005) where 31% of the dropout students had said that they dropped out of schools because they were needed at home. The fact that after 11 years of Dorji’s finding, a Cabinet Minister is quoting the same reason of dropout is certainly a worrying factor and needs urgent macro social policy

interventions. The next sub-section is another dropout reason related to economic conditions.

#### **4.6.2. Lack of Employment Prospect**

Both parents and children are of the understanding that completion of school or higher education is not of much use as even more and more university graduates do not find jobs. While overall national unemployment rate is below 5%, youth unemployment is rather high at 9.6% between the ages 15 – 24 (Kinga, 2005; Tracer Study, 2012).

According to one participant, children also drop out of school due to lack of employment prospects. The participant said “*with the increasing unemployment, both parents and children feel that there is no job prospect or opportunity even after schooling.*” Therefore, the dropout reason stated by the participant aligns with the findings of Choden et al. (2014); Dorji (2005); Subedi and Nepal (2010) and the Tracer Study (2012) where they found students dropping out of school because of fear of unemployment after studying. The above findings are also supported by the National Youth Policy (2011) which stated that there is a mismatch between the skills acquired in school and the requirement of skills for the labour market.

In a knowledge society where skills development is considered paramount to labour market demand, acquiring necessary skills in school has become crucial to having gainful employment. However, on the contrary, Apple (2009) stated that over the past few decades, the school curriculum has increasingly become a ‘battleground’ tremendously influenced by the neo- liberals, the neo- conservatives and the religious populists. While the neo-liberals consider the knowledge and skills produced by the current education system economically useless, the neo- conservatives complain about

the deterioration of discipline and inadequate production of real knowledge. Therefore, he suggested that this hegemonic display of authority by the economic, political and cultural power should be resisted and alternative ways should be found to prevent the widening gap of inequalities.

One participant, echoing the views of neo-conservative views of Apple above, stated that:

*When you talk about designing a school or education system for that matter to fit the needs of a job market, we do need to give this predicament serious and soul-searching considerations after all, you wouldn't want your child to attend a school or college that set its curriculum purely on the basis of market forces. We as a society would be far worse off if their supply and character were determined entirely by free market.*

Consequently, Lamb et al. (2004) stated that some Australian research also shows students dropping out of school; as they think that continuing schooling would not help them find a job. Likewise, Witte et al. (2013b) also affirmed that if students witness those both qualified and unqualified adults having the same unemployment prospects in the job market, they may be de-motivated to continue their education leading to dropout.

However, one participant expressed his view that *“having dropped out, we create avenues for meaningful employment and therefore, to be able to engage them meaningfully in our economy in whatever vocations that we would be able to create.”* This is hardly happening currently unless the policy makers bring in some policy reforms in the near future. For instance, according to Kinga (2005) and the Policy and Planning Division of Ministry of Education (PPD hereafter) (2012) on the one hand, there is demand for skilled labour in the growing Bhutanese market while on the other hand; there is unprecedented growth of youth unemployment at 9.6% looking for jobs currently in the market. Bhutan,

at present is recruiting hundreds and thousands of foreign skilled labourers especially from India. According to Rapten (2014), the country, currently employs 52,000 foreign workers especially in construction sector excluding the day workers at the border towns adjacent to India. Therefore, something appears to be seriously lacking at the top policy level. Rapten stated that while Bhutan cannot do away completely with hiring of foreign workers, appropriate policy measure is required. There is a huge potential for youth to be engaged meaningfully if the policy makers are serious about solving the problem of school dropout and unemployment by providing appropriate skills training to youth.

The present policy of the People's Democratic Party government of sending Bhutanese youth overseas is not a permanent solution in solving the unemployment problem. Instead, it is a type of brain drain which will affect the country socially as well as economically in the long run. It is a predicament that on one hand, unemployment seems to be a growing problem while on the other hand; hundreds and thousands of foreign labourers are recruited into the country.

There is a huge potential for the youth to be engaged meaningfully if the curriculum was seen as relevant to Bhutan's needs, perhaps less would see this as a reason for school dropout. Even the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) also questioned the relevancy of school curriculum drifting away from individual and societal needs. Additionally, there is a report of a growing child labour problem in the country which leads to school dropout. It is discussed in the next sub-section.

#### **4.6.3. *Child Labour***

According to Rumberger (2001), children working illegally or child labour is one of the reasons for school dropout. He stated that children are likely to drop out when they are offered jobs by the

community both during and after school hours. Hunt (2008) and Tidwell (1988) also pointed out that the most noticeable types of child labour in South Asia are related to domestic works for girls and agriculture related works for boys.

In the Bhutanese context too, one participant was of the opinion that some children may also dropout because of child labour. The participant stated that “*they are, may be used as a child labour by other people.*” This observation of the participant is confirmed by the studies carried out in Bhutan by the Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (2010), Chhetri (2011), the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) (2009) and RENEW (2015), clearly indicating that child labour is rampant in the country.

It was also reported that child labour is found to be more prominent with economically backward and poverty-stricken people with 28.7 percent compared to wealthier families at 5.3 percent. Similarly, NCWC (2009) found that of 585 participants surveyed for the child labour study, 317 participants were school dropouts with the most prevalent forms of child labour being domestic helpers, hotel workers and agriculture sector workers. For instance, according to the other participant, “*when people migrate to towns, there is hardly anybody to work in farms, so parents require their children’s helping hand.*” This is tantamount to child labour and increases school dropout.

The above findings seem to confirm that child labour is prevalent in Bhutan and it is one of the factors for school dropout despite the article 19 section 18 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2008) which stipulates that “the state must take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation” (p. 20). Subsequently, article 9.a. of the

Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan (2007) affirmed that “No person shall subject a child to any form of practices such as forced or compulsory labour...” (p. 4).

While both the Constitution of Bhutan (2008) and the Labour and Employment Act (2007) protect child exploitation, there seems to be a conflict between the two. For instance, the Constitution mandates the state to protect children from all forms of discrimination and economic exploitation but to the contrary, article 171 of the Labour and Employment Act (2007) stipulates that even though children below the age of 18 are considered minors, children from 13 to 17 of age are eligible to take up some form of employment. Such contradictions may be resolved through policy dialogue to minimise the negative impact on young people.

Although, the Labour and Employment Act mentions 13 – 17 as minimum permissible ages for works, the Act does not mention the permissible areas of work, permissible number of working hours and categorisation of child work areas into light, non-hazardous, hazardous or worst forms of labour (NCWC, 2009). Perhaps because of this, despite the existence of policy and institutional frameworks to protect and promote children’s rights, there are hundreds of children being denied their rights and engaged in child labour, making the matter worse by influencing school dropout.

Similarly, according to RENEW (2015), though Bhutan has the Labour and Employment Act, the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources have not yet come out with a definition of child labour. For example, harmonisation is required between the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Labour and Employment Act. If children between 13 and 17 years of age are legally able to take up some forms of employment according to the Labour and Employment Act, this has to be clearly defined in the Act and distinct policy formulated as to what constitutes child labour. Such clarity in policy may help



underprivileged students to earn some extra money with certain restrictions on the number of hours, while at the same time curbing the illegal child labour problem and school dropout.

The Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and the Ministry of Education, who oversee the child protection and child rights against child labour abuse, have the national mandate to expound on what systemic changes and/or support services are set up to ensure that children remain at school and are not driven out into the labour force.

Subsequently, as child labour in poor developing countries in South Asia is attributed mainly to poverty (Hunt, 2008; Tidwell, 1988), the next subsection dwells on poverty as one of the main reasons for school dropout.

#### **4.7. Poverty**

Poverty is usually a common factor for school dropout especially in poor developing countries (Dorji, 2005; REC, 2012; Tidwell, 1988). Apple (1996) also asserted that high school dropout rates are always high among low-income populations, especially among poor people. One participant indicated that *“probably, poverty could be one reason why people drop out.”* Similarly, the next participant also opinioned saying that *“we thought one of the main reasons may be because of poverty.”* The participants’ views are substantiated by the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) which states: “In Bhutan, apart from remoteness and inaccessibility, the major cause for students’ dropping out is poverty” (p. 48). Poverty, as one of the reasons for school dropout is discussed in the following subsection.

#### **4.7.1. People with Absolute Poverty**

In Bhutan, 12% of the population still live under absolute poverty according to Bhutan Poverty Assessment (2014) carried out jointly by the World Bank and Bhutan Statistics Bureau. The study adds that many rural families who were declared having come out of poverty are at risk of falling back to poverty or some non-poverty families are falling into poverty. Therefore, direct and indirect policy interventions targeting at both education and poverty/SES are crucial components of policy reforms which are explained in the following successive paragraphs.

According to the second participant, *“many drop out because they do not qualify from grade 10 and well to do families send them to private schools within or outside the country but many who are again poor may not be able to afford.”* Although, education is supposed to be completely free in Bhutan, parents do not seem to be able to support their children’s education even up to the basic education level i.e. grade 10. Does that mean that there are hidden and indirect costs involved, e.g. uniforms, travel, food, stationeries, pocket money etc.?

A number of studies from Bhutan do suggest that poverty is one of the main reasons for school dropout as parents cannot afford to pay expenses towards their children’s schooling. Hence, poverty is a big financial barrier in schooling (Asian Development Bank and National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2013; ESRC, 2008; REC, 2012; Subedi & Nepal, 2010). For example, 33% of students who dropped out of school said they could not afford school expenses (Subedi & Nepal, 2010). Likewise, RENEW (2015) found in their study that whopping 48.13% (n=428.83) of the 891 respondents said they are out of school because of poverty. Therefore, as suggested by Pufall et al. (2015), financial barriers to school enrollment such as fees, uniforms, books etc. be removed as incentives to families as a direct policy

measure.

Sabates et al. (2010), investigating educational policy reforms in African countries found that one of the policy interventions introduced by Ghana in 2005 at the basic school level, called capitation grant scheme, drastically reduced the dropout rates and increased enrollment. Through capitation grant scheme, the government directly provided the funding to all public schools, whereby, the burden of school fee was taken off from parents. This policy attracted high enrollment and even previously dropped out students started returning to schools. As a result, there was an increase of 17% in enrollment in primary and junior high schools.

Expressing his opinion on government policy on poverty reduction, another participant stated: *“poverty is something that we are emphasizing on and in fact, we have been identifying each poor people”*. While the government cannot make policies to provide direct financial incentives to rescue families out of poverty, they can bring about legislative and policy reforms to create environment for families and communities to engage in socially and economically viable activities to uplift their living standard. That is the reason why the responsibility of policy makers, which is quite often completely left out of the drop out study is quite critical for policy decisions and intervention strategies (Witte et al., 2013). For example, Sabates and Feinstein (2007) remarked that the UK government’s changes in labour market conditions by introducing a minimum wage system, provided substantial value to low wage workers and also by offering subsidies for educational programmes, the policy reforms created tremendous effects on the reduction of youth crimes and increase in student retention. Similar interventions may be initiated in Bhutan while another problem associated with school dropout in Bhutan is rural-urban migration.

#### 4.8. Migration

According to UNDP (2014), poverty in Bhutan is a rural phenomenon and 66% of the poor live in rural areas. As the country is facing rising socio-economic problems, rural-urban migration is one of the highest in South-East Asia. Given that, one participant remarked *“I think of three main reasons why children drop out of schools; one is because of migration from rural to urban areas.”*

Gosai and Sulewski (2014) stated that due to urban migration, Thimphu (capital city of Bhutan) has the highest urban population with 79,185 people. This accounts for 80.3% of the district's total population. Furthermore, according to the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (2005, p.140) from amongst the 20 districts of Bhutan, Thimphu has received the highest number of rural-urban migrants at 54,685 followed by Chukha at 25,951 and Sarpang at 17,997 migrants. Besides Thimphu; Chukha and Sarpang districts have received significant numbers of migrants because Phuntsholing town located under Chukha district is the industrial hub of Bhutan while Gelephu, another industrial town lies under Sarpang district. These industrial towns have attracted rural people and unemployed youth looking for employment opportunities and better economic life.

There is no doubt that rural people target these places for job prospects and better life opportunities. In terms of migrants going out of districts leaving their homes, Trashigang district has the highest number of migrants at 23,802 followed by Mongar district with 12,871 migrants. A total of 111,770 people migrated from rural to urban areas as per the PHCB (2005) report. These figures are disturbing for a small country like Bhutan with a small population.

In a more recent study, Rapten (2014) pointed out that the districts like Thimphu, Samdrup Jongkhar, Sarpang, Pemagatsel and Dagana show constantly higher unemployment rates while some

other districts like Trashignag, Zhemgang, Trashiyangtse and Lhuntse do not have severe unemployment problem. This trend indicates that the districts with more economic activities attract more people looking for employment opportunities which encourage migration.

One of the reasons why districts like Trashignag, Zhemgang, Trashiyangtse and Lhuntse do not have severe unemployment problem is because their economy is rural based. Most people there, practice agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood as well as income generation and self-employment. On the contrary, districts like Thimphu, Samdrup Jongkhar, Sarpang, Pemagatsel and Dagana have higher unemployment rates as these districts are more of urban and semi-urban in structure. Therefore, unemployment in Bhutan is a problem of urban areas with growing economy and unemployed youth migrating to these urban centres. Therefore, balanced development and equal economic activities in all the districts and regions of the country for employment generation as well as for prevention of migration is crucial (Rapten, 2014).

Our urban centres currently face not only civic problems but other likely social problems such as school dropout, unemployment and anti-social behaviours are on the rise. Consequently, Pufall et al. (2015) warns that if intervention strategies are not put in place, children who migrate themselves on their own or with families are seven times more likely to drop out of school in comparison to children who do not migrate. Hence, policy interventions or strategies are of utmost importance to decrease dropout and mitigate the problem. Otherwise, as pointed out by Priesner (2012), there is a risk of the country's urban population doubling to 60% between 2005 and 2020 which will put tremendous pressure on urban centres in dealing with the rapid influx of migrants from various rural parts of the country. Rural-urban migration is a current happening trend, despite the government's effort to mitigate the problem. Drove

of families with their children move to urban centres, often neglecting their children's education.

#### **4.9. Family**

Family related issues are one of the major factors of school dropout as suggested by literature. So is the case in Bhutan, as expressed by the participants in this study. A study carried out by RENEW (2015) also pointed out to lack of family support in their children's education. Lack of family support could be one of the common causes of dropout for a number of reasons. In some circumstances, lack of family support in their children's education effort to schooling is a good reason for school dropout as per the perspective of one participant that children drop out of school when *"they do not have family support."* Lack of family support for their children is a growing trend in Bhutan when once close-knit families and social systems are getting distorted by a number of negative influences which are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs. Similarly, the next participant also expressed his view that *"it is really not to blame the children alone but we have to blame our parents how they (children) have been brought up."*

A study carried out by RENEW (2015) on vulnerable children, found that children of disadvantaged and broken families or single parents are most vulnerable. The divorce is on the rise leaving children with single parents to take care of them. 10% (n=89.1) of the 891 respondents' parents were found to have divorced. In addition, according to their report, there are a category of parents who are addicted to gambling leaving their children at home all alone at night. Yet another family problem reported by the study is family violence in the households and even parents serving prison terms. These are serious growing societal problem vulnerable to children that need to be addressed through multi-

prong strategies such as multi-sectoral approach, awareness campaign, legality etc.

Even a number of studies have pointed out that family is an important factor for school dropout. McGee et al. (2011) found that family factor such as parenting process and neighbourhood in the community as predictors for anti-social behaviour and dropout. Similarly, Lamb et al. (2004) stated family factors such as single parent or step families as one of the main reasons for school dropout. They further added that studies from the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia found that family related factors are strongly connected to students' graduation or dropout.

In the same way, according to Merlov and Wolpin (2008), a child whose mother has not had a high school education is 88 percent more likely to drop out than one who has and get into problem. Likewise, a child who was born to a teen mother is 78 percent more likely to drop out than born to an older mother. A youth who has always lived with both biological parents is 34 percent less likely to drop out than one from a broken home. Additionally, Lamb et al. (2004) also observed that the students are affected when there is violence in the family. Hence, Rumberger and Lim (2008) emphasised that having a good home environment with social and financial resources would enable a student to graduate.

#### **4.10. Orphans**

In some cases, some students drop out because they are orphans as there is nobody to look after and take care of them. One participant put into the right perspective stating his opinion that “*orphans have nobody to look after them leading to dropout.*” Similarly, Pufall et al. (2015) stated that one possible cause of dropout happens when children become orphans with no one to take care of them. In a study conducted in Lesotho by Smiley et al. (2013), orphans are more at risk of dropping out of primary

school before reaching secondary school. Even Lamb et al. (2004) found a significant number of children from disadvantaged and homeless dropping out of school. Therefore, Pufall et al. (2015) suggested that one way of intervention is to support households and families looking after orphans.

In Bhutan, there is no official data or literature to show that orphans are dropping out of school in significant numbers but there may be some cases as pointed out by one participant. The participant's view is supported by the AMICUS Foundation, a US based NGO, stating that there are orphans who even cannot afford free school education. Hence, such children are supported and taken care of by the Simtokha School and Orphanage. Unless such vulnerable children are looked after by support care system or extended families, achieving academic success is an acute problem.

#### ***4.11. Poor Academic Achievement***

The connection between poor academic achievement and school dropout is well established in the literature as its role as a long process to ultimate dropout according to Lamb et al. (2004). Poor academic achievement is a strong and early predictor of students likely to drop out from as early as primary school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In Bhutan, after grades 10 and 12, students especially coming from low SES and poor families drop out of school as they fail to qualify to secure government scholarships for further studies. Therefore, issues such as disqualification for further studies, grade retention and inaccessibility to education are discussed in the following sub-sections.

##### ***4.11.1. Disqualification for Higher Studies and Government Scholarships***

One of the reasons of school dropout is that children fail to qualify for higher education after



grades 10 and 12 which really is a barrier for children especially coming from economically backward and poverty-stricken families or communities. *As articulated by one participant, "... they are dropping out of class (grade) 10, may be from class (grade) 12; many drop out because they do not qualify and then are not able to get into the institutions and schools."* Similarly, according to the Tracer Study of the PPD (2012), while education up to grade 10 constitutes basic education and is intended to be universal, post-basic education is presently more restrictive and aligned to cater to the human resource requirements of the country. Therefore, access to grade 11 in government schools and colleges is based on the students' performance in grades 10 and 12 Board Examinations which is a hindrance to students aspiring to go for higher secondary or college/university education.

After completion of grades 10 and 12, students who do not qualify for government scholarships, are forced with two options, either to study in private school/college or opt for vocational trainings. The problem as stated by some students is that they cannot afford private education and the vocational training institutes cannot absorb all disqualified grades 10 and 12 graduates. Consequently, according to one participant, *"some well-to-do families of course try to support their children to send them out but many who are again economically weak family background, they may not be able to send."*

Although, the government policy is to offer scholarships to high achieving students and let average and low achieving students opt for vocational trainings, a handful numbers of vocational training centres cannot absorb everybody. Therefore, students from poor family background have no other options than to drop out and are likely to remain unemployed leading to undesirable behaviours and crimes. This is contradictory to the article 16 of the Constitution which states that the State shall provide free education to all children of school going age up to grade 10 and ensure that technical and professional education is

made generally available (UNESCO, 2011).

It is a serious policy decision that the policy makers and legislators may have to consider when the seats in government schools and vocational education institutes are limited; children coming from poor family background especially from rural places have no other option than to drop out of school. In their hope to find jobs, they land up in towns and urban centres and when jobs are hard to get, they tend to commit crimes (Dorji, 2005). This indeed seems to be vicious cycle with implications to the society and nation, unless appropriate policy strategies are initiated.

To support the above argument of policy inadequacy, in 2014 academic year, 44,207 students were studying in grade 10 according to the Annual Education Statistics (2014); out of which only 40% of grade 10 passed students were supposed to be admitted in grade 11 in government schools as mandated by the government policy (PPD, 2012). That means in 2015, only 17,683 students had qualified for government scholarships and 1,311 absorbed by vocational training institutes. A staggering figure of 27,213 students was supposed to be left bewildered with no options to go anywhere else. In such a scenario, students with economic means usually find admission in private schools in Bhutan and some go to India and other countries looking for schools and institutes (REC, 2012). However, according to the National HRD Advisory Series (2015), an astounding 18% of grade 10 students were found unemployed in the labour market in 2015.

While private schools are options for students who do not qualify for government scholarships, students from weak socio-economic family background and poverty cannot afford to fund further education beyond grade 10. Hence, when significant number of the population are still under poverty not being able to afford even basic education for their children, in such a scenario, the government policy of

privatizing of schools in Bhutan is anti-poor policy, which may widen the gap between the rich and poor. UNICEF (2014) stated that Bhutan's privatization policy may provide risks and face challenges in the future. Even the government has recognized this problem when the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) stated that:

Although the school privatization policy has eased the admission pressure in the public high schools, the disparity in accessing higher secondary education has actually widened as most of the private schools are established in urban areas. Many parents in rural areas are not able to afford sending their children to private schools. (p.24)

For that reason, it is imperative that the problem is observed from the perspectives of the Cabinet Ministers and policy reforms are initiated. Such a situation needs immediate attention of the Cabinet Ministers and Legislators, otherwise, the risk is that those unemployed youths migrate to towns and cities and engage in anti-social behaviours and crimes as stated by Dorji (2005). The next section dwells on grade retention as a dropout factor.

#### **4.12. Grade Retention**

Grade retention is anti-progressive promotion policy in many ways. Children tend to drop out of school when they are made to repeat the same grade once or even twice as they are getting older compared to other peers. One participant expressed his view that: *“repetition of classes seems to be a problem. When children repeat classes, they tend to feel shy and leave school. They also become overage when they sometimes repeatedly fail.”*

This perspective of the participant is supported by the study carried out on vulnerable children by

RENEW (2015). The study found 5.63% (n=50.16) of the total 891 respondents dropped out of school because they failed in their grades. Likewise, the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) stated that the overall learning progress of children is alarmingly slow. For every grade, one additional year is required to master the competency level of that grade especially in primary school. That indicates that there is high repetition of grades.

Correspondingly, Smiley et al. (2013) also found in Lesotho that older students those who reached secondary level were likely to dropout due to grade retention as they became overage. Although, studies have shown that children repeating grades and grade retention have been one of the factors for school dropout but there is nothing a student can do about it, as Rumberger and Lamb (2003) put it, the decision to drop out may be driven by some factors beyond the control of young people, or may even result from systemic flaws rather than factors intrinsic to dropouts themselves. Analysis of education reforms from the OECD countries show that most efficient and effective policies are student centered and teachers' capacity building (OECD, 2015).

In this context, Balfanz and Legters (2005) stated that schools with powers to promote students to the next higher grade have fewer dropouts, suggesting, whether to promote or detain is altogether a policy matter. Consequently, the study by the European Commission (2013) and the OECD (2015) also provided policy recommendation, that system level policies should remove all possible hurdles within a school setting, which might obstruct children from graduating high school and hinder movements between grades.

While grade repetition does seem to be a problem in Bhutan, another challenge for policy makers is how to make schools accessible to children especially in far flung remote parts of the country.

#### ***4.13. Inaccessibility to School***

According to Hunzai, Gerlitz and Hoermann (2011), significant number of people of Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region, comprising of eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan live in difficult mountainous terrains with inaccessibility, fragility and marginality, away from economic and power centres. As a result, these people living in remoteness and difficult conditions have hardly any say or influence over policy and decision-making processes that could reform their lives.

Thus, in Bhutan, coupled with poverty and harsh mountainous terrains, access to education is a challenge when students have to walk for miles to go to school in the morning and return home after school in the evening. Such long walking distances compel students to drop out of school as pointed out by one participant stating that “dropout sometimes is because of the remoteness of the school, walking distances to school”. Huge problems are experienced in rural areas as pointed out by iDiscoveri Education and the REC (2009) as students take a lot of pain to travel over difficult terrain to reach schools in country areas. IBE-UNESCO (2004) also stated that because of rugged mountainous terrain and scattered settlements, enrollment remains a challenge for Bhutan. Long walking distance is believed to be the main cause of non-enrollment and dropouts especially in primary schools. However, they observe that as a policy measure, the government is committed to providing mid-day meals through World Food Programme support and reducing walking distance by establishing additional community primary schools. This commitment by the government seems to align with the finding of the national education assessment study conducted by the Bhutan Board of Examinations (2004) which stated that children who travelled shorter distance to school every day performed better academically.

Moreover, the government has the policy to provide boarding facilities to students, who are unable to participate in education due to distance and to explore bussing services as a cost-effective alternative to boarding. However, implementation and streamlining of the policy is yet to happen and also the policy does not spell out any strategies or modalities of providing such facilities to students. No clear-cut criterion has been drawn up.

The literature has also pointed out that due to walking distances and without easy access to schools, students tend to drop out of school. To cite few examples from African countries: Nava (2009) discovered that inaccessibility to education compelled children to walk to and fro between home and school for hours. As a result, children, particularly young ones who did not have money for transportation dropped out of school. Likewise, Chinyoka (2014) in her research also revealed that walking distance to and from school was a cause of school dropout. In a similar dropout study by Ntumva & Rwambali (2013), they discovered in their study that 46.7% of the respondents lived away from school between the radius of 5km to 20 km and beyond, walking to school and back every day making them tired. Most often, they had to walk in rains and were late to school resulting in receiving punishment from teachers. This led to school dropout.

Further, Moyo, Ncube and Khupe (2016) found that due to inaccessibility to secondary schools in the locality, students had to start early in the morning at 4 am to school and arrive back home by 6pm every day. Consequently, because of long distance walking, especially girls were found to be dropping out of school. Therefore, according to Moyo et al. (2016), their research revealed that distance and inaccessibility of education facilities is a dropout factor.

In Bhutan too, as reported by the REC (2012) and the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014), because

of difficult topography and the scattered nature of settlements, access to education is seriously constrained. Consequently, RENEW (2015) also found that 2.50% (n=22.27) of the 891 respondents said they dropped out of school because of the long distance between school and home. Thus, there is a huge challenge in increasing school enrolment and decreasing dropout with easy access to education.

When it is evident that inaccessibility to school is a problem, early interventions are crucial. The Ministry of Education as the guardian of the country's education system, may urgently introduce systemic tiered intervention programs, leading from one intervention programme to another systematically or through alteration depending on their suitability and success (MacIver, 2011; OECD, 2015).

#### ***4.14. Summary***

| Although the literature from school dropout studies have pointed to a number of reasons or factors for school dropout, in Bhutanese context, according to the participants in this study; factors such as SES, poverty, family and academic were found to be the major reasons for school dropout in Bhutan. School dropout is embedded within a complex range of socio-economic conditions, family, peer, work, school, and individual psychological processes. Therefore, as expressed by the participants, dropout is influenced by more than one factor. Not only did factors inside the school setting affect students to drop out of school, but many outside factors influence their decision to drop out of school. The literature available on the topic of school dropouts does correlate with the findings of this study. The literature supports the idea that there are many factors that lead to students dropping out of high school, as well as policy and preventative measures that can decrease the number of high school dropouts in the future.

While there are policies put in place currently to address the above issues, they are found to be inadequate and too generalized with lack of proper coordination among stakeholders and there are no specific programmes and activities to address the problem. Therefore, school dropout is, without a doubt, an important social, economic and educational concern (Mathis, 2013), which requires intervention from the policy makers who have an insight as to what priorities are necessary to address the problem.



## **CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL ISSUES**

### ***5.1. Introduction***

This chapter discusses school related issues that came out strongly in the interviews and which are supported by the literature. Apple (1996) emphasised that although school dropout and students at risk are basically educational problems that need an educational solution, it is naive to perceive that solutions to the school dropout problem, poverty and unemployment as being found within the school alone. Long-term solutions, according to Apple, require a “more searching set of economic, social, and political questions and a considerably more extensive re-structuring of our social commitments” (p.70). With this cautionary note, the issues such as the teacher factor, school curriculum and school discipline policy are discussed in the subsequent sections.

School is an important place in which children develop cognitive competencies and obtain knowledge and problem-solving skills essential for effective participation in society (Bandura, 1997), but a number of factors within a school system, directly or indirectly contribute to student achievement as well as student dropout and teacher factor is one such factor.

### ***5.2. Teacher Factor***

In this section on the teacher factor, issues related to a teacher such as teacher quality, government policy on teacher recognition and incentives, teacher motivation and attitude and the nature of teacher’s work are discussed. It is said that teachers are arguably the most important group of professionals in any nation building. For instance, Hattie (2003) stated that out of six variables for student achievement,

teacher quality is the single most important variable that makes a difference to a student's achievement. Therefore, as the teaching force is an education system's one of the most important assets, it has to ensure that each individual teacher is motivated enough. In fact, one participant aptly stated that *"I see three or four pillars that would be needed in the education sector; one is teacher, the capacity of the teacher."*

Thus, critical reflection should fetch transformation in their attitude and towards their career which may bring about drastic improvement in their work environment through series of professional development activities accompanied by sound extrinsic as well intrinsic motivational incentives. Continuous, high-quality professional development is essential to the nation's goal of high standards of learning for every child as teacher quality is biggest influence on student learning outcomes.

#### **5.2.1. Teacher Quality**

The findings on teacher quality from the literature seem to resonate with the perceived responses of the participants. For example, in terms of quality of teachers, one participant said that *"there could be very good teachers; I know very passionate teachers who love their profession but I also know teachers who would not like to be in school, they would like to leave."* Similarly, another participant echoing the views of the other participant said that *"I have met teachers who are very interested and enjoying their profession and I have also met teachers who have been complaining."* When teachers lack motivation, dedication and professionalism and the teacher quality is inspiring students and enhancing student learning may be hampered. As a result, students that drop out of school because of the teacher factor, not only lose out on knowledge, skills, values and attitudes beneficial to

them in a knowledge society, but they are at the risk of educational and social disadvantage rendering themselves as unproductive. This is a serious national concern for Bhutan as 59% of the population consists of youth below the age of 24 (Tenzin, 2009).

The quality of teachers in Bhutan has been a topic of discussion over the last couple of years. Although, it cannot be generalised, numerous studies have pointed out that a large number of teachers in Bhutan generally lack professionalism and commitment and much is to be desired in terms of teacher quality. For example, teacher absence is an issue without fixed responsibilities (Young et al. 2009). Similarly, in a research study jointly conducted by iDiscoveri Education and the REC (2009), it was reported that teacher quality in Bhutan is left much to be desired. They stated that although teachers show openness and willingness to learn, their content knowledge and pedagogical skills require upgrading. Equally, a study conducted by the Bhutan Board of Examination (2004) to assess the national education system found that teachers had relatively low experience of in-service education to update skills and refresh and enhance professional knowledge.

Subsequently, as recently as 2016, the National Council Education Review Committee, reviewing the quality of education in Bhutan found that as per the policy of Education Ministry, teachers are required to undergo a minimum of 80 hours of need based professional development annually. However, they observed that teachers generally do not receive adequate opportunities to attend professional development programmes, hence, they are not able to enhance their professional knowledge and skills.

As stated by UNESCO (2006), teachers are the most important factor for determining the quality of education received by children. As such, governments have the responsibility to ensure that teachers

perform to the best of their abilities. To do this, governments must pay attention to a number of factors that affect teacher performance. The overall education system should transform into a more welcoming environment which not only provides teachers of diverse backgrounds with professional and academic support, but also one that acts as a source of emotional and moral support.

According to the Teacher Human Resource Policy (2014), the Bhutanese government is aware of this need and has been accentuating the development of a highly motivated and competent teaching cadre which supports a holistic approach to education and student learning. Subsequently, the Teacher Human Resource Policy states that “the main objectives of the Education Ministry are to enhance the morale and motivation of teachers through a good career ladder” (para. 1). However, it may be contested that to have highly motivated and competent teachers, a number of strategies geared towards professional development must also be taken into consideration amongst others. As affirmed by Hattie (2003), although teachers have the power to influence, few teachers do damage while some maintain status quo in student achievement and many are excellent teachers. Thus, he suggests that the system should identify such excellence and groom and develop them to have a powerful impact on student achievement.

The National Council Education Review Committee (2016) also stated that as mandated by the Teacher Human Resource Policy (2014), there is teacher selection processes involved for selecting teacher candidates for teacher training. Notwithstanding this, both the Ministry of Education and the College of Education said that there are constraints in selecting candidates with the right attitudes and aptitudes into the teaching profession as the teaching profession is not the first career option; only candidates who disqualify for government scholarships and other higher education studies apply to the

College of Education. Likewise, the Education Blueprint (2014) also pointed out this flaw in government policy in teacher selection process e.g.:

In Bhutan, grade XII graduates are selected for admission to the two Colleges of Education based on merit ranking. The top percentage of each cohort of grade XII graduates is first selected for ex-country scholarships to pursue professional courses. The next cohorts of the student are selected for in-country scholarship to pursue higher studies. It has been observed that generally, teaching is the last choice for most of the grade XII graduates. (p.37)

| The trend in teacher selection process is exactly the opposite of Singaporean teacher selection process where they select from the top one-third of the cohort (Ning et al., 2010; Zhao, 2015). Therefore, to enhance teacher quality, testing both attitudes and aptitudes of the candidates are of paramount importance. As perceived by the participants and supported by literature, teachers are arguably one of the most important components of a school system, therefore, enhancing teacher quality has to be a top policy priority for prevention of student dropout. Teacher-student relation was found to be a major factor in student retention as good teachers nurture and take care of their students (Choden et al., 2014). While teacher quality has been a societal concern sparking national debates, another topic of contention has been the issue of teacher recognition and incentives as prerogatives for teacher performance.

### **5.2.2. Government Policy on Teacher Recognition and Incentives**

One participant emphasized the government's initiatives to motivate teachers to retain them in the teaching profession. For instance, he said:

*Teachers have been in focus, governments: previous and present had been focusing on the*

*teachers trying to motivate them, inspire them to retain them in our system. Teachers' allowances, at one time was 45 percent extra allowances we had provided to teachers but it only goes to show that we need to do more.*

The next participant also added, *“the government of Bhutan since 1960s, teachers have been given a special attention and even the fifth King every year recognises teachers through the award of medals on 17<sup>th</sup> December during the National Day.”* Another participant stressing on current teachers' status said:

*Issues have always been raised again and again about motivating teachers and improving the quality of teachers, improving their work life; so much has been issued and government has tried its best to at least compensate the hard work they put through. Recognition wise, I see in Bhutan particularly, government has been trying to do its best to recognise teachers to inculcate the sense of importance of teachers. So much is being done, but yet, some teachers do not seem to be motivated to continue in their profession.*

Some of the policy initiatives of the government are the creation of the Bhutan Education Blueprint, strengthening of the Royal Education Council and the creation of the Teacher Human Resource Policy. It is crucial to boost the overall education system in the country including teacher quality and teaching proficiency, so that there is enhanced student academic success and less wastage due to grade repetition and dropout. The quality of education in Bhutan in recent years at the basic education level i.e. from pre-primary grade 10 is widely believed to be failing (ESRC, 2008, REC, 2012, Choden et al., 2014). There are debates going on across the country. It was even discussed in the successive National Assembly sessions. The problem has been highlighted in successive annual national

Education Conferences. Thus, it may be stated that the main factors such as lack of proper organizational structures, inappropriate curriculum, and poor teacher quality among many others contribute to the poor quality of education which has direct bearing on school dropout. Nonetheless, despite the successive governments' efforts as expressed by the participants above, there seems to be a policy gap that needs to be carefully analysed and looked into as a matter of serious policy concerns.

For example, the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) stated that the Teacher HR policy of Education Ministry stresses on the need of attracting and retaining the best teachers through providing the best possible remuneration and other incentives. However, teachers are currently given a minimal lump sum of professional allowance based on their seniority and positions ranging from Nu.1,115/- to Nu.10,915/- (roughly AUD 23/- to AUD 227/-) which is not commensurate to the workload that each teacher puts in daily. Therefore, they observed that the education policy pronouncing attractive compensation to attract those high-quality teachers to rural and difficult remote areas has not been appealing and has not drawn much attention. Many teachers still continue to work in extremely challenging circumstances and many have retired without due recognition despite their enormous contributions. According to a UNESCO study (2006), the failure to provide attractive additional incentives to work in very remote rural schools is a key factor for de-motivation of teachers resulting in poor academic achievement and school dropout. Relatively very large incentives may be necessary to attract teachers to work in such schools. Unless the government takes drastic policy measures, teacher factor will continue to have negative impact on student achievement and student retention.

There is a general societal apprehension that the government has to do more to retain good teachers in the system for the benefit of the children and society at large. For instance, there is very little

professional support given to schools from the dzongkhags (district administration) as per the assessment study of the Bhutan Board of Examinations (2004). The above initiatives such as the Education Blueprint and the Royal Education Council are long term goals and may need a separate study in future to ascertain their success. These policy issues are further discussed in Chapter 7 as they have direct impact on student dropout and retention. However, in the next subsection, teacher motivation and attitude, which are considered very important in student performance are discussed.

### **5.2.3. Teacher Motivation and Attitude**

There is a general feeling that significant numbers of teachers in Bhutan have low motivation in their profession. A research study on ‘Teacher Morale and Motivation’ undertaken by Dorji (2006) concluded that the majority of teachers in Bhutan are suffering from poor morale and lacked motivation within their profession. Similarly, it was pointed out by Young et al. (2009) that it is evident teachers in Bhutan are generally not happy about their teaching profession. In general, their motivation and morale are low. The National Council Education Review Committee (2016) study also found that teacher job satisfaction levels in Bhutan stood at 68.3 percent; which means 31.7 percent were unhappy with their teaching profession. Thus, out of a total of 7,887 teachers working in government schools, 5,387 teachers are motivated in their teaching profession whereas 2,500 teachers are not so motivated. This number is worrisome and as a consequence, 4% (n=315) of teachers on average, leave the system every year for various reasons. Consequently, the perception of one participant is that *“the current general perception is that Bhutanese teachers are not motivated in their teaching profession. The attrition rate of teachers leaving the education system is 30% as of now. In 2014, from primary schools alone, 258*



*teachers left the system.”*

Therefore, there is no doubt that when teachers are not motivated enough in their profession, the teacher quality could be adversely affected which in turn could affect student learning and also lead to student dropout. The participant further mentioned that there could be two reasons why teachers are leaving the system: *“one reason could be, as Bhutan is geographically a land locked country with difficult mountainous terrains, serving in remote areas could be a de-motivating factor. The other reason could be the lack of training opportunities for teachers.”*

The fact that teachers are leaving the education system in large numbers looking for better opportunities is confirmed by one participant who said: *“... every profession is in competition with the other profession in terms of attractiveness. So, this is the reason why you see a lot of teachers are leaving.”* The current trend of teachers leaving the education system does not bode well for the government which has direct impact on the country’s education system. Hence, policy on teacher recruitment and deployment, professional training and allowances and other motivational incentives and teacher workload must be revisited for retention and enhancement of teacher quality as suggested by the National Council Education Review Committee (2016).

Teacher attitude is another factor, as students who had dropped out of school and were interviewed by Choden et al. (2014) stated that they dropped out of school, because it was demoralising for them, when teachers looked down at low performing students. Even the literature such as the study by Lamb et al. (2004) pointed out that 15 percent of students interviewed said that they left school because they did not like school or did not like the teachers.

Yet, according to one participant, *“there are extremely selfless and dedicated teachers and not so*

*dedicated teachers but the role of a good teacher is indispensable in motivating and inspiring the children.”* The next participant added, *“I think these are the problems associated with developing nations; like any other professions, people look for greener pasture and attitude is a big problem.”* Another participant expressed, *“I don’t know whether it is only in Bhutan or anywhere in the world, teaching is not taken as your number one choice in your career as it seems quite a dull profession.”*

Numerous studies have shown that the quality of education is adversely affected when teachers are poorly motivated for professional development. A study carried out by Bennell (2004) showed that there is a wide range of views about teacher motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia which includes Bhutan. There appears to be an unacceptably high proportion of teachers working in public schools in many countries who are poorly motivated owing to a combination of low morale and job dissatisfaction, poor incentives, and inadequate controls over professional conduct and performance, including behavioural sanctions. As a result, professional standards and performance are low and falling further, in these countries affecting student retention.

Generally speaking, there are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. However, according to Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (1989), although intrinsic motivation is highly desirable, most of the activities in which teachers, students, and other human beings engage themselves are most directly influenced by extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation. Similarly, the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) observed that although intrinsic motivation factors such as student achievement and opportunity for professional growth might motivate teachers, extrinsic factors like good working conditions and remunerations uplift their morale and motivation.

Nonetheless, according to O'Neill (1995), extrinsic motivation might work for a short term

behaviour change but impairs higher order thinking skills and does not provide for long term changes in an individual's behaviour. Thus, extrinsic motivators may lead to merely short-range activity while actually reducing long-range interest in an activity. Therefore, it is essential that extrinsic motivators be backed up by intrinsic motivators or that the extrinsic motivation becomes internalised through some processes. If this does not happen, the result is likely to be a reduction in the very behaviour an organization wants to promote.

O'Neill (1995) argued that teachers have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational needs. A teacher who is intrinsically motivated may be observed to undertake a task for its own sake, for the satisfaction it provides or for the feeling of accomplishment and self-actualization. Yet, an extrinsically motivated teacher may perform the activity or duty in order to obtain some reward such as salary or incentives. Of course, extrinsic motivation plays an important part in people's life. It is crucial in influencing a person's behaviour. Nonetheless, the aim of the institution should be to build on and enhance the intrinsic motivation for teachers to teach effectively and at the same time, to supply some extrinsic motivation along the way for school improvement.

It follows that, when teachers lack the motivation and desirable attitude to do their jobs, their classroom performance is adversely affected as well as their ability to work cohesively and with a healthy team spirit within the school. Consequently, they lose their interest for further professional development and the impaired quality of education is reflected in the inadequate learning outcomes of their students (O'Neill, 1995), leading to high repetition and dropout rates which is likely to impair the country's progress. UNESCO (2006) rightly stated that teachers are the most important factor in determining the quality of education that children receive. As such, governments have the responsibility

to ensure that teachers perform to the best of their abilities. To do this, governments must pay attention to a number of factors that affect teachers' performance which should impact on student academic achievement and student retention. The next section is the discussion on the nature of teacher's work in the Bhutanese context.

#### **5.2.4. Nature of Teacher's Work**

One participant believed that *“teaching is not an easy task; it is a very demanding task.”* Another participant added, *“I also feel you have to look at the work load of the teachers. I find it very heavy for teachers.”* The national education assessment study by the Bhutan Board of Examinations (2004) also pointed out that teachers in Bhutan have too many academic activities to carry out besides a number of extra-curricular activities. Large class sizes and a lack of resources also pose major hindrances in carrying out the professional classroom duties by teachers.

Moreover, the study by the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) also indicated that compared to other professions in the civil service, teachers have a poor working environment. Teachers have a small working space with poorly equipped furniture, limited computers, printers and copiers, weak or no internet connectivity and inadequate teaching-learning resources. The study also found that teachers' workload was disproportionately higher compared to other civil servants. Teachers perform duties beyond classroom teaching and supervision. For example, they perform duties such as preparation of lessons and assessment of students' works; they devote time to extra-curricular activities outside of normal duty which are rarely viewed as teachers' work. As a result, the study pointed out, teachers in Bhutan work for 57.51 hours a week on average or 10.45 hours a day.

There is no doubt that teachers have heavy workloads in Bhutan. Unlike in other countries, a teacher's job is sometimes 24 hours a day job especially in a boarding school. Apart from a heavy teaching responsibility, a teacher is music and dance instructor, a sports instructor, a hostel warden, a clerk and hosts of other duties are entrusted upon teachers. They tend to perform these non-teaching responsibilities beyond school hours sometimes staying late into the evenings while the salary they receive is on par with other civil servants whose jobs are from 9 AM to 5 PM normal duties.

Dorji's study (2006) also pointed out a number of key factors in regard to teacher's workload such as (a) heavy workload and disproportionate remuneration, (b) too much expectation with little support, (c) lack of recognition and acknowledgement, (d) unfair placement and training, (e) public image and social status, and (f) lack of policy support. Although, some of these have been addressed over the years, there are still some issues which need policy reforms as rightly pointed out by one participant that *"so much is being done by the government but it only goes to show that we need to do more."*

Both the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) and the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) while studying the teacher status in Bhutan have recognized that involvement of teachers in non-academic tasks have diluted the status of the teaching profession which has adversely affected the morale of teachers.

In concluding this sub-section, according to iDiscoveri Education and the REC study (2009), the Bhutanese society at large is seriously concerned and has expectations of the government and the Education Ministry to review their education policy. They want the education system to be revamped and rectified in order to raise the quality of education in the country, ultimately reducing school dropout and preventing anti-social behaviours. Similarly, studies by Dorji (2006) and the National Council

Education Review Committee (2016) also found that the teachers' workload in Bhutan is heavy which is disproportionate to the remunerations that they receive. This has gravely impacted on teacher performance which in turn has affected students' academic achievement and thereby dropping out of school (Choden et al., 2014). One of the issues along with enhancing teacher quality is the development of a school curriculum that caters to the needs of the individuals as well as the society.

### **5.3. School Curriculum**

A school curriculum is the backbone of any education system. Broad curriculum aims in most countries emphasise the transfer of knowledge which is seen to be valuable for national or economic development, social unity, political identity, or religious and cultural independence. While the school curriculum should prepare young people for the world of work in an economically competitive and globalised world where learning, re-learning and unlearning of knowledge and skills are of paramount importance to succeed in life, instilling moral values and attitudes is equally important in a country where the 'gross national happiness' is considered more important than the 'gross domestic product' (Bhutan 2020 part II). One participant emphasised the importance of curriculum by stating that *"education must be a dynamic process; it must reflect the needs of not just present generation but the need of the future as well and not just the need of the physical but also the need of the spiritual, the ethical, the moral and the aesthetic."*

However, in trying to incorporate all the above aspects and many more elements into the Bhutanese curriculum in the name of wholesome education, the curriculum is overcrowded and ineffective to children at times. One participant felt that *"sometimes we load curriculum with*

*everything...so many things we try to put into curriculum and I find curriculum quite heavy and sometimes, I feel that you have to prioritise.”* On the contrary, the other participant was of the view that there is nothing to worry about the curriculum. He believed, *“I don’t think there is problem with the curriculum. I think it has all the elements. So, I am not really convinced that the curriculum, syllabus is ineffective.”* Subsequently, the next participant also stated that *“I am not really convinced that the curriculum or syllabuses have been ineffective.”*

Nonetheless, the Bhutanese curriculum is either too broad or ill-structured because children even passing higher secondary school are not skilled enough for any kind of job. For example, there is a mismatch between the skilled job seekers and the labour market demand, as Bhutan has a skilled labour shortage and is currently dependent on foreign workers. In a study by Choden et al. (2014), children told them that they dropped out of school as they found what they learnt in school irrelevant to their life. When students drop out of school, it is a clear indication that the educational institutions in particular are not providing adequate knowledge and skills for the benefit of their students. Pivotal to this, is the realization that school curriculum are hierarchically organized bodies of knowledge and irrelevant to student needs, particularly to the way in which these curriculums marginalize or disqualify working class knowledge (ESRC, 2008, REC, 2012). For this reason, the functions of a school curriculum should be more responsive to the social and economic needs of the country to make the curriculum relevant to employment and also to develop human values and attitude.

The National Council Education Review Committee (2016) also asserted that the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014 – 2024 has clearly mentioned that “curriculums must foster acquisition of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of innovation, creativity, enterprise and universal human values of peace and harmony. School

curriculums therefore ought to be dynamic, relevant and contemporary to foster the development of holistic education – education with character” (para 1). However, the National Council Education Review Committee suggested otherwise of the current status of school curriculum in Bhutan. They have made a critical observation such that: ...it is one thing to put it very clearly in the Blueprint and altogether a different thing to implement as envisioned. On observing more closely in the schools, our schools face significant challenges in the implementation of school curricula and achieving desired outcomes of children’s learning. (p. 13)

For example, both teachers and students interviewed for the study by the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) said that there is difficulty in completing the prescribed syllabuses for the year as they are too bulky. Because of heavy syllabuses, teachers are compelled to conduct extra classes to complete syllabuses in time which tends to neglect student learning and understanding. Therefore, they observed that “such style of learning through propositional knowledge deposit does not encourage students to be analytical and critical of what is taught and learnt”. The issue seems to be a critical observation that warrants government attention. Likewise, ESRC (2008) also observed that children were found to have dropped out of school when they found learning uninteresting and the curriculum heavy. Choden et al. (2014) also observed that one of the reasons for children dropping out of school was irrelevant curriculum which did not lead to the creation of knowledge and skills useful to their life or world of work. Hence, there is a gap between the labour market and school graduates. The policy makers ought to do something about it when Bhutan is increasingly dependent on expatriate workers especially from India.

Similarly, in regard to the relevancy of the school curriculum, the National Council Education



Review Committee (2016) found that besides the heavy nature of the school curriculum, the textbooks and subjects are heavily dependent on Indian and foreign borrowed curriculum. For example, the grade 4 English subject contains only three texts on Bhutan and 38 foreign texts. Likewise, the grade 9 Geography has chapters on cocoa plantations in Ghana and the Masai herder of Tanzania which may not be necessarily relevant to Bhutanese contexts. This finding is supported by the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) which stated that there are student achievement gaps between rural and urban students because of disproportionate foreign borrowed content in the textbooks.

Even the literature suggests that some children are found to drop out because of curriculum related issues. Lamb et al. (2004) said that children dropped out because of the lack of interest or irrelevant courses offered by school. Moreover, grade retention, which was discussed in Chapter 4 as a reason for school dropout, is a result of the curriculum structure that require children to pass the end of year examination to be promoted to the next higher grade. Hence, the examination system, conducted to test the learning outcomes of children appears to be another policy hurdle that could be looked into as a policy priority.

### ***5.3.1. Move Away from Examination Oriented Curriculum***

Moving away from the traditional examination-oriented curriculum towards one which develops attributes and values has been the participant perspectives of this study. This is a profound viewpoint coming from the policy makers which seems to be aligning with the upcoming trend in many countries of either doing away with an examination system totally or partially to measure students' academic achievement (Zhao, 2015). According to Masters (2013), because of the emergence of learning needs

resulting from advances in technology and rapid pressure for assessment reforms especially from governments, education systems, school leaders, teachers and parents, developing appropriate assessment strategies to measure both academic as well as life skills and attributes is essential. Further, Masters (2013) stated that the area of educational assessment is presently alienated and in disorder. Fault lines fragment the field into differing, and often competing philosophies, methods and approaches. Therefore, student assessment, which seems to be in disarray, needs reforms to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to prevent students from dropping out of school. For instance, according to Marcotte (2011), in the US, there is a high school dropout rate because of the testing system called ‘school exit exams’ especially at grade 12 despite offering alternative pathways to graduation. Similarly, Ning et al. (2010, Zhao, 2015), stated that schools in Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Shanghai in China are trying to move away from the age-old traditional examination-oriented system to a more wholistic approach, so that hurdles to school dropout are removed and learning is geared towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs. In similar lines, one participant said:

*We are teaching students just to pass the examination. We are not teaching students to learn and then explore and then educate yourselves to be a better citizen, to get better employment. I feel that we need to do more. We are only concerned about passing examination and all you want is marks, all are rated by marks. So, can you do something that you are rated by other elements, not just by examination marks?*

The next participant referred to His Majesty the King who emphasised the development of life skills in students. He added, “*along with life skills development, Bhutanese value system needs to be upheld and this is an important asset that we have; we need to nurture it, we need to promote it.*” All

these skill developments and value education aspects may not be tested appropriately through an examination system alone. Another participant was of the view that *“although literacy and numeracy must be taught up to basic education level i.e. grade 10, side by side, children must be exposed to development of skills and pursuing their skills and pursuing what they are interested in and what they are good at, their potentials. That I believe should come from quite young and examinations should not be hurdles to progressive learning.”*

Subsequently, a study by IBE-UNESCO (2004) on the national development of education in Bhutan, found that about 87% of students completing primary education i.e. grade 6, go on to attend the next higher grade while others, about 13%, repeat the same grades and some drop out. A significant number of children repeat grades because they fail in their annual examinations. Thus, this is not only a personal loss for the children as they repeat grades and are more likely to drop out but it is also a huge financial implication to the government as education is free in the country.

Although, students are assessed annually based on two summative assessments and some formative assessments (continuous assessments) for each subject from pre-primary through to grade 10, there appears to be discrepancies and shortcomings. For example, in grade 10, students are assessed internally for 20 marks through continuous assessment; marks awarded by each subject teacher and externally for 80 marks purely based on written examinations conducted at the end of the year by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment.

However, the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) while acknowledging the benefit of internal assessment carried out by teachers based on students’ academic performance on an ongoing basis, a huge discrepancy was found between the internal continuous assessment mean and

external written assessment mean. The report stated: "...the lowest mean score of one of the subjects was 26 out of 100 and continuous assessment mean score for the same subject was 93 (20 percent converted to 100 percent for easy comparison). There was a discrepancy of 67 percent. Such differences were observed across all subjects and schools." (p. 23)

Moreover, some teachers who were interviewed for the study by the National Council Education Review Committee also shared the concerns of misuse of internal/continuous assessments by teachers. Therefore, assessing students without considering their learning outcomes aided by teaching, achieves no purpose and the whole aim of evaluating a student's academic achievement is defeated. As a result, students are less inclined to study and they tend to drop out of school as reported by ESRC (2006) and Choden et al. (2014). The National Council Education Review Committee further stated that it is hard to pinpoint the underlying causes of the discrepancy without a detailed study; nevertheless, they recommended that the current continuous assessment system in schools be revisited with the sole objective of assessing the holistic development of children.

The BCSEA (2013) made a similar observation earlier which stated: "Continuous assessment and summative assessment for grade 10 need to be rationalized and clear Continuous Assessment policies across all subjects at grade 10 with rubrics for 20 marks should be developed and implemented uniformly" (p.15).

Although formative assessment is practiced alongside summative assessment, it is mainly restricted to project work, homework and classwork in the name of continuous assessment. Hence, a more holistic approach to student assessment is required by which student assessment is consistent with the curriculum. To ascertain that the assessment is consistent with the curriculum, the curriculum itself

needs to be dynamic for all-inclusive student learning. The Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014) too has identified that student assessment is a core area of testing students' learning which requires drastic restructuring.

On the contrary, although some East Asian nations recognise the strengths of their traditional education system, culture, and values, they are challenging or even abandoning them in order to create a new education system required for the future (Zhao, 2015). In Singapore for example, ranking of schools based on examination results was removed or significantly modified because schools then concentrated more on performing well in the examination and neglected others aspects of student learning (Zhao, 2015).

This trend is prevalent in Bhutan at the moment. Grades 10 and 12 students who have to attend external board examinations are given special attention by schools at the cost of neglecting other forms of learning. Students are almost barred from participating in extra-curricular activities such as games and sports, arts, social work, cultural activities and so on with the view that students would be distracted from their studies resulting in poor performance and tarnishing the school image.

Whereas in China there is no standardized testing from grades 1 through 3 and only one test is allowed in grade 4 per semester (Zhao, 2015). This is a positive step not to burden children with too much workload and pressure. Subsequently, Zhao (2015) also stated that the policy reform of four East Asian systems (Singapore, Hongkong, Korea and Shanghai) is to widen the definition of education outcomes beyond a narrow set of subjects and international test scores. Instead, their goal is to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as creativity, communication, collaboration and higher-order thinking abilities while emphasising moral education and social skills development. Hence, these East Asian systems have

initiated policy reforms to reduce the number of tests in schools. Likewise, in Australia, a Teachers' Guide to Assessment was written (Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards, 2016) to implement uniformed and best assessment practices which are associated with the Australian curriculum. The Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards are the point of reference for assessing and reporting on students' learning from kindergarten to year 10 in all schools. This provides teachers with deeper understanding of the whole purpose of assessment and gain confidence in assessment practices. This is especially for formative assessment where teachers in Australia use wide range of assessment strategies such as below:

**Diagnostic assessment:** Diagnostic assessment can help identify students' current knowledge of a subject, their skills and capabilities, and to clarify misconceptions before teaching takes place. Knowing students' strengths and weaknesses can help teachers plan what to teach and how to teach it.

**Curriculum based assessment:** Curriculum-based assessment is a type of formative assessment that allows students to demonstrate their level of skills along a continuum. A specific level curriculum-based assessment covers all the components in a specific skill. The information gathered can reveal exactly where a student needs to be placed in the teaching sequence.

**Curriculum based measurement:** Curriculum-based measurement is used to measure student progress towards mastery of specific skills. It is sometimes called progress monitoring. Student progress can be monitored using short assessment tasks or probes at regular intervals.

**Computer assisted assessment:** Computer-assisted assessment is a broad term for the use of computers in the assessment of student learning. Computer-assisted assessment is a fast and

efficient way to provide immediate feedback to the learner, and to save time on marking. It is typically formative, in that it helps students to discover whether they have learned the intended learning goals.

**Peer assessment:** In the context of student learning, peer assessment is used to evaluate other students' work, and to give and receive feedback (Wilson, 2002). With appropriate training and close moderation, it is possible that students can play a role in summative assessment, but generally peer assessment works best in formative assessment where students give each other feedback on each other's work. Performance and attitude can be evaluated with peer assessment.

**Self-assessment:** With self-assessment, students check their work, revisit assignment drafts and texts, and research and reflect upon their past practice. Care is needed to teach the student to make judgements on what was actually achieved rather than what was meant. But once mastered, in addition to judging one's own work, the concept of self-assessment develops skills in self-awareness and critical reflection. Many of the benefits of peer assessment apply to self-assessment.

**Continuous assessment:** Continuous assessment usually involves a series of tasks that are individually assessed. It may be appropriate to add a final assessment to continuous assessment. Continuous assessment is best used when there are several distinct module learning outcomes which are achieved at definable stages during the module. (pp. 9 – 12)

By the same token, Masters (2013) in Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards (2016) reported that in order to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the framework for student assessment of student learning is undergoing a fundamental change and suggests three modes of transformation:

**New thinking:** The main purpose of this assessment is to monitor student learning. It

ascertains the student's current knowledge and skills and his/her ability to understand and do things. It is also ensuring what is required for the learner to progress to the prerequisite standard of attainment at the end of the year or band as per the curriculum objectives or mandates.

**New metrics:** New metrics tend to assess a wide range of attributes and skills other than those addressed by most contemporary assessment practices. In case of Australian context, Masters (2013), states that the skills and attributes are assessed against the Australian curriculum as general capabilities.

**New technologies:** Creating learning environment using real-time interactions online have the probability to change assessment practices through more personalised, interactive and intelligent forms of evidence gathering, which enables instant and effective feedback to learners. (p.6)

Further, Masters (2013) added that these three developments, together with progress in the understanding of learning itself, are transforming school assessment practices for the betterment of student learning. According to Willging and Johnson (2009), students are likely to drop out, if they find the learning environment dissatisfactory and the course structure inadequate. Likewise, Sebates et al. (2010) also found that children were dropping out of school when the provision of education was of poor quality and sub-standard and too much of examination oriented. Subsequently, Moore (2017), stated that many students dropped out of school because they thought the school had nothing to offer to them. Students felt that they could do better without the education that was being provided to them. Hence, school curriculum without rigid testing system is considered to be quite crucial while other factors such as school ambience is equally important.



#### ***5.4. School Discipline***

The school discipline policy and practice are an integral part of any education system in order to provide a conducive learning environment for students. A study by BCSEA (2013) found that schools which provided caring and positive environment for students achieved better academic results in English than schools which did not provide such an environment. The unpleasant environment had a negative outcome on student performance.

When discipline measures such as a zero-tolerance policy, suspension, expulsion etc. is imposed strictly on students, studies have found that it contributes to undesirable consequences including school dropout (e.g. American Psychological Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Cumbo & Burden, 2012; Dorn, 2003; Jarjoura, 1993; Mathis, 2013; Rumberger, 2001). While the intention of the school is good, to prevent disciplinary problems, and it is being used as a corrective behavioural measure, the strategies or methods used on students usually go wrong as suggested by these studies. For example, Cumbo and Burden, (2012) and Mathis (2013) stated that schools with high rate of suspension and expulsion have low rates of conducive school environment, inviting more troubles.

In Bhutan, because of the growing youth problem in general and student misdemeanors and behavioural problems (Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency, 2014; Dorji, 2005; Panda et al., 2009; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2009), the Ministry of Education introduced a zero-tolerance policy in schools in 2012. Although, there is no extensive study to substantiate its success or failure, Choden et al. (2014) claimed that the zero-tolerance policy did not seem to be working well in schools with more disciplinary problems arising out of it.

In order to confirm the findings of the literature that a zero-tolerance policy or any other strict

disciplinary measure imposed on students is counterproductive, the participants' perspectives were sought as to whether the zero-tolerance policy introduced by the education ministry in 2012 has been effective in helping improve students' behaviour. The results of their responses are discussed below.

#### **5.4.1. Zero Tolerance Policy**

Responding to the question on the introduction of a zero-tolerance policy in schools, one participant said: *“There was lots of reservation initially but now it is working well. Peer pressure either works negatively or in some cases, peers are helpful in a positive manner.”* Similarly, the next participant said,

*principals told me that the impact has been very positive because of this zero-tolerance policy. And although, it will sound draconian, it will sound very un-liberal and unprogressive; the impact that it has created has been very good and very positive as I hear it. I have no studies conducted on it.*

The participant also has a positive view about Bhutanese children as good, and well behaved in general when he said that *“our children are good, well-disciplined; it is just one or two stray cases that we talk about and therefore, we miss out on that 99% of the youth, children who are actually very good, decent people.”* While it may be inappropriate to categorise students in general as good or bad, a number of studies in Bhutan have found that substance and drug abuse including alcohol and tobacco consumption among students is alarmingly on the rise (e.g. Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency, 2014; Global Youth Tobacco Survey of Bhutan Report 2013; Panda et al., 2009; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2009).

Moreover, the police records also showed that Bhutanese youth had committed various crimes.

For example, juveniles and adolescents involved in crime for five consecutive years from 2009 to 2013 show a total of 2,696 and 145 crimes committed by males and females respectively. Therefore, macro level policy formation and support are of utmost importance so that appropriate strategies are framed at the school management level to prevent rising anti-social youth behaviours. This is supported by Gyamtsho et al. (2015) who found that most of the inmates of drugs and crime rehabilitation centres were school dropouts.

Consequently, the third participant was of the viewpoint that *“when administered with fairness and impartiality, it can only contribute positively to an increased awareness and respect for the rule of law and a sense of order and responsibility in society.”* Speaking on the similar line, the fourth participant said that the success or failure of zero tolerance policy will depend on the school management. The participant added, *“we have to put the right context; we have to put the right perspective in dealing with zero tolerance. If you just take literal meaning, then we may go wrong. So, we have to get this deeper understanding of what it means by zero tolerance.”* The participant reiterated that a certain level of discipline is required in the school for the improvement of children’s character, their behaviour but be able to manage it properly is in the best interest of the children not in the interest of school management. If children’s behaviour improves, there is less likely of them, missing school and dropping out of school. Research shows that most students at risk of dropping out could be recognized as early as elementary or middle school and they are likely to graduate if they are provided with timely and appropriate support (Jones and Gregory, 2011)

The participant further stressed on the parental role stating that *“parents must also think in the same manner that it is been done to smarten their children.”* Literature has pointed out that family or

parental support is crucial in moulding a child's behaviour. For instance, McGee et al. (2011) stated that the parenting process plays a crucial role in preventing a child from getting involved or influenced in anti-social behaviour in a neighbourhood or community where a problem is prevalent.

In line with the parental role in supporting their children build their character and behaviour, the fifth participant was also of the view that wherever parents worked closely with schools, the zero-tolerance policy worked positively. The participant stated that in some schools, both parents and teachers have meetings and discussions, make agreements and counsel together and implement the policy jointly. However, the participant also said that *“in those schools where the management may be weak or where there is lack of parental support, there seems to be a problem.”* The participant added that a zero-tolerance policy is a noble initiative though.

From the above statements of the participants, it gives the impression that a zero-tolerance policy in Bhutanese schools is working where the school management is strong and when there is good parental support. Then questions such as these could be asked: What happens to schools with weak administration and poor parental support? Are these schools getting rid of the troubles by transferring or expelling students with difficult behaviours or in some cases, students themselves dropping out of school? However, on the other hand, literature presents altogether different strategies. For instance, Riehl (1999) stated that by following such policies and practices, the school in its haste to wash its hands of trouble makers, in fact is inviting more troubles to individual students, family and society through expulsion or transfer of students. Instead of expelling or transferring trouble making students, they should be retained and intervention strategies put in place through counseling and engagement processes, so that children do not drop out of school. For instance, according to Jones and Gregory

(2011), expulsion and suspension from school for disciplinary reasons might increase students' disconnection and alienation from school that might lead to students dropping out altogether. Instead, they suggest that recognition of link between disciplinary problem and school dropout is important and establish alternative ways to reduce dropout such as: introduction of restitution time by fixing the damaged items through vandalism; parental involvement for positive behaviour; and creating a structured, coordinated behavior support plan specific to the student's target behavior might decrease the undesirable behavior and reduction of dropout.

According to Cumbo and Burden (2012), no evidence indicates that a zero-tolerance policy improves school safety or student behaviour; instead, a constructive approach such as positive behavioural support, character education and social and emotional learning programmes are found to have reduced violent behaviour and have improved academic achievement. Cumbo and Burden (2012) suggested a three-tiered decision-making framework known as the "School- Wide Positive Behavioural Intervention and Supports" looks encouraging. SWPBIS focuses not just on preventing misbehaviour and discipline but it also provides three-tiered support to students in social, culture, academic and behaviour aspects, which means all students of the school receive support at the universal or primary tier (70 - 80%). Even after universal intervention, if some students do not improve their behaviour, more rigorous behavioural support is provided to the selected or secondary tier in selected groups of students (10 – 20%). If student behaviour is still unresponsive, an intensive or tertiary tier support is given to students individually or face to face (5 – 10%).

The APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) also recommended that students with repeated adverse behaviours and extreme cases, even if suspended or expelled, require a separate continuous learning

environment. Such separation would provide a school climate appropriate for the rest of the children in school. In Bhutan, that does not seem to be the case as discussed above and such policy needs to be reviewed and re-considered; otherwise, schools are likely to face stiffer behavioral and school dropout challenges.

Subedi and Nepal (2010) found that 54 of the 94 dropouts that they interviewed said, if given second chance, they would like to go back to school. Similarly, Choden et al. (2014) stated that the participants in their study were of the view that expelled students should have provisions to re-integrate into school. Thus, policy makers have to question themselves and deliberate on this issue which should ultimately lead to policy reforms (Haynes, 2002). Policy makers also must ensure that children and young people are kept at the centre of all policies aimed at reducing school dropout and it is equally important that children's voices are heard while developing and implementing such policies (European Commission, 2013). Haynes (2002) further emphasised that the need for change in policy in education arises as a response to a set of problems which are considered to be crucial.

Therefore, when school dropout is a growing problem with youth who are unskilled and without basic education and who are looking for employment, alternative or continuing education seems to be the best policy strategy to derive maximum outcome from the Bhutanese youth when the country is dependent on foreign skilled labourers at present (Kinga, 2005). Witte et al. (2013b) also emphasised that governments should be aware of the growing importance of second chance learners which otherwise work as a buffer against employment and barriers in access to lifelong learning. While offering a second chance to school dropouts is an appropriate step, the effort to retain students before they drop out of school is a better strategy.

### **5.5. Summary**

This chapter analysed and discussed the school issues such as teacher factor, school curriculum and discipline in relation to the individual interviews, supported and supplemented by policy documents and literature. Factors like teacher quality, motivation and attitude; relevancy and adequacy of school curriculum and zero tolerance policy and school climate are found to be directly or indirectly influencing school dropout.

Although, features like school infrastructure, school leadership, parental support and so on are very important for student learning, by far, teachers are the most important resource according to Hattie (2012). While the teaching force is most crucial in any education system, the curriculum is equally important as it is fundamental to educational reforms targeted at achieving high quality learning outcomes. These learning outcomes must be measured by well-developed assessment tools; however, in the Bhutanese context, the curriculum is supposedly overcrowded equally supported by ill-equipped assessment strategies that need to be reviewed and reformed. Hence, school dropout is preventable if policy reforms are initiated and put into right perspectives.

## **CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL DROPOUT AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS**

### ***6.1. Introduction***

This chapter involves a discussion about the association between school dropout and anti-social behaviours of students and out of school youth. The findings from the literature are synthesised with the responses gained from the individual interviews of the participants. In regard to school dropout and anti-social behaviour, there is a debate amongst the scholars and researchers as to which one comes first, although, there is no evidence as to which one is the cause of the other as there are a number of other causes involved. As Bandura (1989) stated:

Causation does not mean that the different sources of influence are of equal strength. Some may be stronger than others. Nor do the reciprocal influences all occur simultaneously. It takes time for a causal factor to exert its influence and activate reciprocal influences. (p. 2)

Therefore, this study explored the possible relationship between the two issues. To find a relationship between school dropout and anti-social behaviours will have policy implications for the prevention of risky behaviours; this occurs through investigating policy issues by listening to the voices of the policy makers.

### ***6.2. Association between School Dropout and Anti-social Behaviour***

Although policy makers are making concerted efforts to mitigate the problem, according to Tait (2012), youth are treated like artifacts by different government agencies such as police, psychologists, health personnel and sociologists, accusing them of drug abuse, prostitution, petty theft and gang related



crimes. Just as any repressed group of people would resist, so do youth.

In Bhutan, school dropout and youth anti-social behaviour are believed to be increasingly becoming a societal problem. For instance, according to the National Statistical Yearbook of Bhutan (2013), 4,172 students (8.2%) from grades 6 to 10 dropped out of schools in 2012. Also, in 2013 alone, 126 crimes were committed by youth aged 24 and below in three districts namely Thimphu, Chukha and Samtse while the same records show 4,188 males and 222 females below the ages of 24 committed various crimes from misdemeanours to murders nationwide from 2009 to 2013.

Similarly, Raptan (2014) said that in July 2010, the Royal Bhutan Police discovered 38 male youth gangs and 18 female youth gangs in Thimphu engaging in anti-social behaviours. All these gang members comprised of both students and school dropouts. Hence, there seems to be an association between school dropout and youth anti-social behaviour as the participants said that there could be some kind of associations between the two but they could not ascertain that the one is the cause of the other due to lack of concrete evidences (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; DuPont et al., 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Gyamtsho et al., 2015; Jarjoura, 1993), although these two are separate issues and not all dropouts commit crimes while not all youth with antisocial behaviours are school dropouts. There are other causes for school dropout.

When participants were asked whether they thought there was a link between school dropout and anti-social behaviour, the first participant expressed his opinion that *“I would not like to jump on to the conclusion for the lack of a research there, although the common knowledge tells us that probably there is some linkages.”* The participant further added, *“whether it is our school dropouts or whether it is anybody else, the rise in crime, the drug use; so, all of these are serious concerns that are emerging in*

*our Bhutanese society.*” According to the second participant, *“I think it would be naive and simplistic to say that all anti-social behaviours are caused by the school dropouts.”* Also, the second participant expressing his perspective in agreement with the first participant said that *“we can assume some co-relation but this certainly is not the only cause.”* The third participant, however, expressed *“there may be a link between school dropout and anti-social behaviours but I see a very weak link between these two.”*

| The fourth participant was also of the impression that there could be an association between school dropout and anti-social behaviour and unemployed youth. The participant’s viewpoint was that *“if you are dropouts and not gainfully employed, you hang nowhere. In that circumstance, yes, youth issues are definitely linked.”* This participant also stated that the circumstances under which children are dropping out of school should be identified because while students leave school due to specific reasons, they may be exceptionally talented or skilled to either pursue further education or attend vocational training. The participant was also of the view that there could be association between school dropout and anti-social behaviour and highlighted that policy support was required for students who dropped out to engage them meaningfully with gainful employment or participation in continuous education. The fifth participant expressing his view stated that *“there seems to have a connection. Those dropouts coming from rural areas go back home to work in the farms but in the urban areas they hang around towns and create social nuisance using drugs or alcohol.”*

The above perspectives from the participants are in line with the literature findings that not all dropout students display anti-social behaviour nor that all students who exhibit anti-social behaviour dropout out of school, although these two exist problems side by side (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; DuPont et al., 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Gyamtsho et al., 2015; Jarjoura, 1993). As evident

from the literature, the problem of school dropout and anti-social behaviour are somehow associated. It has also been established from the responses of the participants that these two problems are likely to exist in Bhutan and may be associated. In addition to the participant responses received for this study, a study conducted by Gyamtsho et al. (2015) with youth attending Health Counseling Centres and the Police Rehabilitation Centre in Bhutan also found that most of the inmates interviewed were school dropouts and suggested that those students who dropped out of school are at a greater risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour and/or crime.

Similarly, according to DuPont et al. (2013) and Jarjoura (1993), even though dropout students do not commit all of the crimes nor do all youth exhibiting anti-social behaviour drop out of school, there is univocal agreement that there is a relationship between school dropout and anti-social behaviour. For instance, DuPont et al. (2013) stated that “while there is heated debate in the research literature and among policy makers concerning the ‘chicken-egg’ question of which one comes first—academic difficulties or substance use—there is compelling evidence that the association is bidirectional” (p. ii). In some people, academic difficulties come before the onset of substance use, and in those cases, a vicious cycle can ensue leading to even more serious academic difficulties and eventually dropping out of school. In other cases, substance use happens first which contributes to academic failure and dropout, especially when substance use becomes regular and severe. For example, according to Gill (2009) and Kelly (2012), three-quarters of state prisoners and three fifths of federal prisoners in West Virginia are high school dropouts. Likewise, according to Rumberger and Lim (2008), “students’ activities and behaviour outside of school, particularly engaging in deviant and criminal behaviour also influence their likelihood of remaining in school” (p. 3).

Consequently, Aloise-Yong and Chavez (2002) found in their study that substance abuse was highest for dropouts. Similarly, studying to find the relationship between school dropout and substance abuse, Townsend et al. (2007) said that the finding of the association between dropping out and substance abuse would present valuable implications for prevention of risky behaviour. DuPont et al. (2013) also said that the association between substance abuse, lack of academic achievement and dropout are well established among researchers and educators, but policy makers are reluctant to talk about it openly.

In Bhutan, while the problem of youth anti-social behaviour has been prevalent for quite some time now with the full knowledge of the government, nothing seems to have been initiated to mitigate the problem. One participant, however, said that *“having known that there is disharmony in the society; the current government has come out with youth policy and employment policy to safeguard our youths.”* The participant reiterated that it is the responsibility of the government and parents must also take the accountability of their children. However, the policy documents such as the National Youth Policy and the Employment Policy have remained as policy documents at the macro-level without much actions initiated in the fields. Moreover, as pointed out by the NYP (2011), there is lack of proper coordination among the stakeholders in implementing the youth policy. Similarly, the Employment Policy has also not made any difference to the employment situation in the country with the ever-increasing unemployment rate according to Raptan (2014). Therefore, it appears to be the responsibility of the government and its functions to understand the root causes of youth behaviour based on research findings and take the necessary measures to address the problem.

Research points out that some children who display anti-social behaviour tend to continue the same

behaviour of offending into adulthood; this requires intervention strategies at an early stage of a child's life; in other cases, offending would decline as they reach adulthood (Moffitt, 1993; Zara & Farrington, 2013). Therefore, early childhood care and development programs (hereafter ECCD) may be appropriate intervention strategies.

However, in Bhutan, according to Choden et al. (2014), the Education Ministry's policy of ECCD program initiatives are targeted at increasing children's readiness to improve individual achievement levels, so that, children do not drop out at a later stage. However, the results from their study revealed that though the ECCD program may be good for children's early development, the participants pointed out that it is a privilege for urban dwellers and those who can afford it. Similarly, ESRC (2008) and REC (2012) reported that as parents have to pay fees to ECCD centers, only children from well-to-do families can afford this facility.

Therefore, when there is a policy of free basic education for all, privatisation of ECCD programs, which is beyond the means of many underprivileged families make no sense. The ECCD is a crucial educational stage where maximum learning and character building takes place in children's formative years of their growth which will have impact on the behaviour of children in the long run (Choden et al., 2014). Thus, the policy reforms may have to be considered.

While school dropout and youth anti-social behaviours could have serious social and economic bearings on the country (NCWC, 2009), another government strategy could be: how to mainstream children who have already dropped out of school and youth with anti-social behaviour. The next section deliberates on some of the responses of the participants in terms of government policy on support programs and activities along with the findings of research studies nationally, regionally and

internationally.

### ***6.3. Mainstreaming School Dropouts and Youth Displaying Anti-social Behaviour***

Hundreds of young people worldwide disengage from school due to various complex reasons. Most of them who wish to engage themselves in education struggle as they face a number of difficult barriers, both personal as well as policy wise (Lammas, 2012). Similarly, according to Banerji (2015), South Asia has made a huge stride in enrollment and access to basic education since 2000, however, re-engaging in the education system and accessing further learning opportunities especially for youth between 15 – 24 years of ages is a huge barrier. It is the same problem in Bhutan with no policy support for re-engagement programs for disadvantaged young people. Hence, in the succeeding subsections, the responses of the participants as well as some of the programs and activities suggested by literature to mainstream school dropouts and youths with anti-social behaviours are discussed.

#### ***6.3.1. Continuing Education and Skilling Programs***

Acquisition of skills is a significant component of life for survival as well as employability, with the power to enhance one's capacities and to offer a variety of opportunities to individuals, which can lead to productive lives and become informed members of the society. Hence, acquisition of skills becomes crucially important for people who have left school or young people who display anti-social behavior and unemployed youth.

According to the perspective of one participant “*school dropouts can be very enterprising persons. If they can catch up on that aspect of their life taking further, so that youth issues may not be there.*” The

participant further added that “*if we look at the market forces, yes, you need highly qualified people with master’s degree and PhD but equally, we also need people with vocational skills. We need in masses. So, there is a big opportunity.*” In Bhutan, although the National Youth Policy (2011) stated that youth not enrolled in school or school dropouts will be provided with accessibility to education through Non-Formal Education and Continuing Education (CE) Programs but this is hardly happening at the moment. These two programmes have failed to attract school dropout youth. Hence, the policy needs to be reviewed.

In contrast, in Australia for example, tremendous opportunities are available for youth to re-engage themselves in learning and complete secondary education or vocational education at different levels with options or choices based on their interest. According to Te Riele (2014), about 9,000 institutes such as mainstream schools, Vocational Education Centres and Community Colleges and Separate Alternative Programs offer a variety of alternative educational programs aimed at re-engaging disadvantaged youth. Through these flexible continuing education programs, about 70,000 young people enroll and complete these programs successfully each year. For example, mainstream secondary schools offer programs both within and outside schools in the forms of electives, extracurricular activities or replacement of regular classes. However, these programs do not lead to certification but aim at providing support to young people to remain engaged in their school.

On the other hand, programs such as TAFE and Community Colleges offer certificates in general education, ranging from Certificate 1 that enables young people to complete the course titled *Access to Work and Training* through to Year 12 of the Tertiary Preparation Certificate. These programs were initially designed for adults on a part-time or fulltime basis, but over the years they have attracted young

people. Additionally, disengaged or disadvantaged young people also have the option of enrolling in separate alternative programs. These programs are offered equivalent to Year 9, 10, 11 and/or 12 schooling which are exclusively registered or accredited schools and recognised as flexible education. However, they also offer programs that are administered by mainstream school and TAFE and Community Colleges. Such programs are believed to be the efforts of the schools and Community Colleges for enhancement of knowledge and skills which have gained popularity both amongst the youth and parents.

### **6.3.2. Strengthen School and Parental Roles**

The participants were of the view that the responsibility of mainstreaming of out of school youth does not fall on the government alone but equally, parental roles are crucial. For example, one participant said that

*there are a number of skilling programmes and activities initiated by government and civil societies to bring them to mainstream society. However, it is difficult to bring them back unless parents and youths cooperate with the Labour Ministry in its effort towards skilling and preventing them from adverse effect.*

The next participant observed that

*today, our children go through a lot of distractions of internet, Facebook, television and all kinds of games. They would be in the school in the day time but in the afternoon, they go home and they become vulnerable to distractions and therefore, they perhaps are engaging in anti-social activities like this.* Therefore, school and parental roles play a crucial role in moulding the



behaviour of youth towards their academic performance. For example: according to the BCSEA (2013), students whose parents were often concerned about their children's studies seemed to perform better academically than those parents who were rarely concerned. Carrington (2012) suggested a few strategies as a remedy against delinquent youth behaviour: psychological intervention, organising a family life which surrounds a delinquent supported by a social network of teachers, school counselors, home-school liaison officers, health workers and child psychiatrists.

Similarly, as per the perception of the other participant, besides a government effort, there is a need for a combined effort from schools and parents to assist in mainstreaming disadvantaged youth. For instance, he said that *"the government, even during the previous government, what we have initiated is to talk to these people and see what the problems are and if they are willing to continue their education and we give them opportunity to continue their education."*

However, to refute this statement in regard to the opportunity of continuing education, there could have been few stray cases where children could have been given opportunity to continue their schooling but as of now there is no recognised programme designed for continuing education or re-engagement of out of school youth to continue their further education, apart from existence of some counseling and rehabilitation centres spread over especially in the western part of the country. Having such a structural program for continuing education could immensely benefit school dropout young people.

#### **6.4. Counseling and Rehabilitation Centres**

In order to create normalcy and a positive atmosphere for disadvantaged youth, counseling and rehabilitation centres are increasingly playing a crucial role in bringing them to mainstream society. Accordingly, one participant was of the perception that *“the role of early and timely counseling and rehabilitation centers are absolutely crucial. There is now an increased realization of the role and importance of such help and rehabilitation centers and several has been established.”*

Due to the rising youth related problems in the country, a number of governmental as well as non-governmental youth support organisations have sprung up. For instance, the Youth Development Fund (YDF), Thimphu, is a non-governmental organisation, which supports disadvantaged youth in Bhutan. YDF provides financial support for youth development programmes and activities such as leadership skills, drug rehabilitation, special education, basic skills and vocational training, advocacy research and education. It doesn't receive any governmental support. Likewise, REWA (a Dzongkha word meaning “Hope”) in Thimphu is a non-profit rehabilitation centre established under the umbrella of the Youth Development Fund to assist people with chemical dependency problems to recover; this has been in operation since December, 2004.

On the government side, the Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency (BNCA) is the agency of the Royal Government of Bhutan for all matters related to narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, substance abuse and tobacco control. It is an autonomous agency headquartered in Thimphu. Subsequently, the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) has established a rehabilitation centre at Tshimasham in the Chukha district called the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Center to rehabilitate convicted juveniles. These juveniles are mostly school drop outs and unemployed youth who exhibit anti-social behavior; they have

the opportunity of attending normal mainstream school during the day while still residing in the centre. The Royal Bhutan Police (2014) statement reads that juvenile's delinquency is an area of growing concern and it has reached to a stage, where the police could no longer remain complacent and ignore the problem. In view of the increasing rate of crimes committed by juvenile delinquents in the recent years, the establishment of a rehabilitation center for the juvenile delinquents in Bhutan was felt necessary.

While the above organizations is doing a wonderful job to rehabilitate and correct youth behaviour, the centre also faces challenges with both inmates and ex-inmates. According to the study by Mediamax Consultancy (2013) 10 of the 69 past inmates, who had undergone rehabilitation training at the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Center at Tshimasham, Chukha in 2010, 2011 and 2012, resorted or relapsed back to crime. The majority of the re- arrested ex-inmates said that the peer pressure and intoxication followed by poverty and broken family were the main reasons for relapsing into crime again.

Knowing the reasons for such relapses, it perhaps could be fairly easy for the government to frame appropriate strategies to prevent such problems through education as well as social policy initiatives or reforms. For instance, Apple (2009) said that in Brazil, the government established an association called a 'Youth Participatory Budget' which provided empowerment, financial resources and other logistical support whereby thousands of youth could participate in developing programmes and activities beneficial not only to youth themselves but the needs and desires of the communities were also fulfilled with authority for budget allocations. Apple (2009) noted that the initiative such as the above is quite different from how other countries deal with their youth, where they are considered as a problem rather

than a resource.

Similarly, Tait (2012) and Carrington (2012) pointed out that the youth problem is the making of the government because instead of supporting youth, they criminalise them and a high degree of policing is being focused on youth subcultures. Therefore, re-visiting the policy and developing strategies to combat youth related crime is felt to be absolutely important.

### **6.5. Summary**

The completion rate of secondary school in Bhutan is 74.2%, which means 25.8% of students do not complete basic education (Asian Development Bank and National Statistics Bureau, 2013).

Although, Bhutan has made a significant progress in terms of access and enrollment at various stages of schooling within a few decades of adopting its modernisation policy, it is still faced with many challenges with the overall education system, secondary school dropout being one of the main challenges (REC, 2012). This dropout problem is further aggravated by the anti-social behaviour of youth. Most juveniles and young people who engage in anti-social behaviour within the urban cities are supposed to have dropped out, discontinued or left schooling (Dorji, 2005).

Both the literature as well as the participants have pointed out that there could be an association between school dropout and anti-social behaviour. The association is reciprocal, although not all school dropouts engage in anti-social behaviour and not all youth displaying anti-social behaviour are school dropouts. This association between the two issues merits recognition by appropriate policy moves.

## CHAPTER 7: POTENTIAL POLICY MOVES

### 7.1. Introduction

The chapter analyses the importance given to the education sector in Bhutan by successive governments, past and present. Some notable policy moves of the present government are the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024, the National Employment Policy, the concept of Central Schools, and Recognition of Prior Learning which are all geared towards improving the quality of education to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century globalised world. Additionally, it looks at the current macro level policy issues and systemic support rendered to schools in the form of interventions for student retention and reduction of youth anti-social behaviour. The chapter also discusses the policies related to the existing political and economic opportunities or challenges, all focused especially on youth.

### 7.2. Policy Effects

Despite Bhutan being a poor developing country with constraints of resources, successive governments have placed education as a top priority as a policy for its socio-economic and human resource development of the country. One participant articulated that:

*In terms of policy wise, you can see now how the policies are being formulated and are we getting to the right direction is something that you need to see and education policies such that you don't see the result immediately, so you have to wait for long to see that result. But what I can see is, at the moment our current government, we are concerned with the education system and we have been trying to bring some reforms and one reform of bringing this quality education.*

While Little (2011) asserted that political will has been described as a driving force for educational reforms, Kingdon et al. (2014) in their review of education policies in developing countries, expressed both skepticism on the part of some governments and lauded others. Although the state's role in the control of the education system is said to be weakening due to liberalisation and globalisation, the state is the only reliable guarantor to uphold its education system (Dale, 1999). According to the European Commission (2013), the remedy to early school leaving is possible, if an all-inclusive approach founded on robust and constant political commitment in its execution is put in place at all levels.

As school dropout is a global concern, governments and policy makers are constantly considering mitigating the problem through appropriate intervention strategies (Wilson et al., 2011). One way of mitigating the problem by the policy makers is to maximise the use of research findings produced by research while researchers keep on influencing the policy or planning decisions (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). All policies must hold centre stage, while targeting a reduction in the school dropout rate (European Commission, 2013).

| School dropout is not a separate incident happening on its own, but there are processes involved with certain conditions and circumstances, which compels a student to drop out. Thus, it is important for policy makers to address those processes and causal factors with appropriate policy interventions (Hunt, 2008), but most of the school dropout studies have focused mainly on three things: race, age and gender; factors leading to drop out and consequences of dropout. Instead, Hunt (2008) argued that school dropout studies should focus on the actual processes of dropout, and its underlying causes. Similarly, Smith (2003) stated that in-depth causal factors and correlations between variables should be

established. Further, Witte et al. (2013a) have emphasised the importance of policy mechanisms recognising the correlation between school dropout and predictors.

That is why exploring secondary school dropout and anti-social behaviour at the macro policy level through the lens of current Cabinet Ministers has been the aim of the study in gaining much needed insight of the policy level issues and also an understanding of the policy barriers, which could affect the system level practices. Therefore, examination of the antecedents of school dropout and anti-social behaviour to construct reforms and preventive strategies that may be effective in increasing student retention and reducing anti-social behaviour of youth in the country is crucial. Consequently, in the following sections, policy interventions and systemic programs, political and economic opportunities and hindrances are discussed along with participant responses in conjunction with the literature and with the scope for future policy reforms.

### ***7.3. Policy Interventions and Systemic Programmes***

The Bhutanese government's recent policy moves to initiate a number of policy and systemic interventions to overhaul the quality of education, such as establishment of Central Schools and recognition of prior learning (RPL) amongst others are good policy moves. Studies have also suggested a number of strategies at individual, family, community and school levels, but by far, policy interventions are known to be the most effective in curbing the dropout problem to a large extent (Dianda, 2008; Gonzalez et al, 2009; Rumberger, 2011).

Similarly, Filindra, Blanding and Coll (2011) found that there is a strong association between the policy and graduation rates of students. Therefore, it is crucial for policy makers to understand who

are dropping out of school and why they are dropping out and the processes and underlying factors to develop effective policy strategies.

In this context, Witte et al. (2013b), highlighting the correlation between school dropout and predictors, have emphasised on the importance of policy measures in recognising the predictors of school dropout. They further suggested that any policy decision must concentrate on the whole combined institutional factors such as families, schools, students themselves and the wider environment, addressing both the social and academic matters pertaining to school dropout. Aligned with these factors, in the following four subsequent subsections, the concepts of Central School, free and compulsory basic education, youth policy, and employment policy are discussed as options for policy and systemic level support.

### **7.3.1. *Concept of Central School***

One constant policy concept that emanated strongly from the personal interviews of the cabinet ministers was the establishment of a Central School. The current People's Democratic Party (PDP) government's plan was to establish 120 Central Schools in the country by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan i.e. 2017-2018 financial years which was also the end of their five-year term. One of the platforms on which this party was voted into office was to cater to children from far flung and scattered villages in a centrally located boarding school where all basic facilities like food, lodging, uniforms, textbooks and stationeries etc. would be provided free of costs to students. The first 24 pilot Central Schools were built in 2015 with an additional 27 built in 2016 where about 39,551 students are currently studying in these schools according to the press release of the Ministry of Education (18<sup>th</sup> August, 2016).



The rationale of initiating such a concept was to improve the quality of education and efficiency of education services. Furthermore, the Operational Guidelines for Central Schools (2014) also stated that:

While we have been able to expand access to education, we are now facing increasing challenges related to the provision of equitable quality education and emerging youth problems. Similarly, sustainability of small schools due to declining enrolment trends in rural and remote areas, difficulty in deployment of adequate teachers and high cost of service delivery have emerged as growing concerns. (p.3)

According to the participants, the establishment of Central Schools will reduce student dropout and solve youth anti-social behaviour and discipline problems amongst other benefits such as equity in terms of accessibility and improving the quality of education. One participant believed that one of the main reasons for school dropout and anti-social behaviour was poverty and also distance between school and home. Therefore, he said, *“that is why the concept of Central School where we provide everything: food, basic amenities, clothing, so that we can retain them.”* The second participant also believed that *“one way of reducing discipline problem is construction of central schools.”* Similarly, the third participant articulated:

*...the intention of the government, the concerns of the government are that no children should drop out. If the dropouts are happening, must be happening for various reasons but this is a serious concern and that is why if you look into one of the initiatives of the government, is to start Central Schools and Central School is a school where we provide all food, clothing, boarding and it would also ensure equity in education in terms of access, in terms of quality education.*

This initiative seems to be an innovative idea if it is sustainable and beneficial to students coming from far flung remote rural villages and economically disadvantaged families as some students who dropped out said they dropped out of school because of the distance between school and home and/or economic reasons or poverty (Dorji, 2005; Gyamtsho et al., 2015; Subedi & Nepal, 2010). Reviewing the overall education system of the country, the National Council Education Review Committee (2016) had conducted a study on Central Schools. The study found that the government had established 51 Central Schools in the financial year 2016-17 with a total budget allocation of Nu. 2,192.374 million (approximately AUD 43.780 m). The government aims to establish 120 Central Schools by the end of the 12 Financial Year 2017-18 with a very large budget allocation. The Committee is concerned that the cost escalation will have huge consequences for the government and the sustainability of Central Schools in the long run is greatly anticipated. For instance, the cost difference between a student-boarder in a Central School and a student-boarder in a non-Central School is Nu. 19,370.00 (approximately AUD 387) per student annually. Similarly, the cost difference between a day-student in a Central School and a day-student in a non-Central School is Nu. 7,546.00 (approximately AUD 151) annually. The total extra financial burden to the government is to the tune of millions at Nu. 567.011 (approximately AUD 11.322 m) annually.

While the policy intention is good, the concern for the sustainability of Central Schools in the long run is also expressed by the general public in various public forums and social media. Therefore, the Committee has recommended that the government needs to be cautious of the long-term sustainability of Central Schools due to the extravagant expenditure and advised the government to revisit the policy of providing facilities to all students irrespective of their economic background. As of now, everything is

provided free to all students residing in boarding schools whether they came from disadvantaged or affluent family backgrounds.

While there does not seem to be discrimination between students, this seems to be an irrational action of the government not prioritising or providing this schooling on a need basis. Providing amenities to all students will be a costly affair in a poor developing country like Bhutan which is driven by a donor funded economy with huge financial implications. Otherwise, the establishment of Central Schools is a good policy to curb rural-urban migration and prevent youth problems amongst other benefits; however, it is too early to comment on the actual outcome.

Nevertheless, prioritisation of the benefits of Central Schooling on needs-based criteria would have been sustainable and cost effective to the government while immensely benefitting children coming from disadvantaged and poor family backgrounds. Successive school dropout studies by Dorji (2005), the Education Sector Review Commission (2008), Subedi and Nepal (2010), Choden et al. (2014), and Gyamtsho et al. (2015) have all pointed to poverty as one of the main factors for school dropout. Therefore, the government, instead of trying to establish 120 Central Schools with huge cost implications could have built one or two Central Schools in each district depending on the population size, which could specifically cater to poor students only. Needless to say, the concept of Central Schooling is very much in line with the free education policy of the government as enshrined in the Constitution of Bhutan even though education is not compulsory.

### 7.3.2. *Free Basic Education*

As per Article 9.16 of the Constitution of Bhutan, the government shall provide free education to all children of school age up to grade 10 (UNESCO, 2011). Despite the provision of free education, children are still dropping out in significant numbers especially from secondary school level.

Acknowledging this problem, one participant noted that “*children drop out of schools instead of continuing their studies despite the free education provided by the government.*” As pointed out by UNICEF (2014), although education is free, education is not compulsory which allows parents to pull their children out of school or students themselves have the choice of leaving school of their own free will at any point in time without any consequences. This policy certainly needs the attention of the policy makers and legislators as it has both economic as well as social ramifications.

On the other hand, the next participant was of the view that the free education policy and compulsory education policy is preventing school dropout and reduce anti-social behaviour: “*I think the policy of at least all children have to finish high school and free education policy is also helping.*” However, unfortunately, there is no compulsory education policy in Bhutan so far while education is completely free up to basic education level. It appears as if the free education policy needs to be reviewed as there are hidden costs which poor parents are unable to afford. For example, there is a need to travel to a new school for the next level of schooling and other indirect costs. If education also became compulsory in the country at least up to the basic education level, school dropout and anti-social behaviour might be reduced.

Compulsory education laws or policy appear to work in preventing school dropout and anti-

social behaviour of youth. For instance, according to Sabates et al. (2010), Tanzania has recorded high enrollment and low dropout because its government has paid attention to its political and budgetary focus, making education relevant and also making education compulsory. While Tanzania has adopted a compulsory education policy for lower primary school, many countries around the world have policies of compulsory basic education. For example, Denmark has a nine-year compulsory education for children of age 7 to 16 with almost no dropout (Jensen, 2002). Machin et al. (2012) highlighted the compulsory school leaving age laws of the United States and increasing the school leaving age in England and Wales have proven effective in reducing school dropout and thereby reducing crime. A policy of not allowing students to drop out of school before attaining age 18 adopted by 20 states and the Columbia district is a good example of student retention in the US (DuPont, 2013).

Similarly, in order to reduce the dropout rates, the “No Child Left Behind Act 2001” and the “Lisbon 2000” and the “Europe 2020” goals have been formulated in the United States and Europe, respectively. The US Act is aimed at an average high school graduation rate of 90 percent, while the latter two aim for at least 85 percent of all 22-year-olds in the European Union completing upper-secondary education (Witte et al., 2013b). The problem, according to Galimaka (2008), is that policy makers have failed to perceive dropout as a policy problem as they consider it as a micro level issue to be solved at the school or district level; however, Kelly (2012) and Witte et al. (2013b) stated that, there are multiple factors for school dropout, produced by an inappropriate education system and many studies have pointed out policy interventions as effective and meaningful strategies for student retention.

Given that Bhutan has a fairly a young population of 59% below the age of 24 years, education is crucial for the country’s socio-economic development (ESRC, 2008; Tenzin, 2009). Thus, it is

pertinent for the country to review the current education system and formulate appropriate education policy reforms. Policy reforms would be beneficial as a prevention strategy for school dropouts and youth crimes in Bhutan. Hence, the next section is discussion on the political drives and economic hindrances towards that end.

#### **7.4. Political Drives and Hindrances**

With emerging youth issues such as school dropout, anti-social behaviour and unemployment in the country, successive governments seem to have come up with a number of policies to use in the fight against youth problems but societal concerns are repeatedly raised as to whether the government is politically driven or doing enough to mitigate the growing problem. In response to this concern, **the perception of** one participant was that *“under the wise, farsighted and dynamic leadership of our benevolent monarchs, education has always been accorded highest priority and support. We continue to receive free education for all our children even today.”* Likewise, according to the next participant, *“political will is there because there have been continuous issues being raised about quality of education then youth issues, unemployment; these are all interrelated issues.”* In a similar vein, another participant also expressed that *“in terms of policy wise, you can see now how the policies are being formulated and are we getting to the right direction. At the moment our current government, we are concerned with the education system and we have been trying to bring some reforms.”*

Amongst the recent and notable drives to combat the youth problem has been the formulation of policies such as the NYP, the National Employment Policy, the Bhutan Education Blueprint and Technical and the Vocational Education Training (TVET) Plan. Through these policy drives, the

government believes that most of the youth issues that the country is facing today will be resolved. For instance, one participant articulated that *“I would like to tell you that the government is coming out with road maps for education sector and youths in particular called Education Blueprint and Technical and Vocational Education Training plan. These road maps are expected to solve the current problems.”*

Similarly, another participant expressed his opinion that *“I don’t know whether you had chance to see the NYP and Employment Policy documents, so, these are other initiatives that is being undertaken.”* However, according to the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014), the growing youth related problems expressed through various forums including parliament, interim government reports and on the local media about the effectiveness of the current education system have drawn societal apprehension and come under public scrutiny over the last decade or so. As a result, a 10-member Education Review Committee was formed on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2006 to review the education system (Education Sector Review Commission, 2008). Next, the National Assembly of Bhutan deliberated on the quality of education in June 2007.

Yet no tangible outcomes have been achieved despite all the discussions, debates and studies initiated because no one has looked at how legislative and policy decisions, directly or indirectly could contribute to student retention and reduction of youth anti-social behaviour. Therefore, any hindrances might be removed through strong political drives and policy reforms. These political drives coupled with some systemic hindrances are discussed in the following subsections.

#### **7.4.1. National Youth Policy**

According to The National Youth Policy (2011), the policy is targeted towards young people from 13 - 24 years of age; this is recognised as the official definition of Bhutanese youth. This age group has been identified and defined based on a number of national legislations, international mandates and respective sectoral policies. Based on recent statistics, this group of young people are most vulnerable to unemployment, sexual abuse, substance abuse, crime and violence and a wide range of health issues including HIV/AIDS. The target groups of this policy are school dropouts, unemployed youth, and young people engaging in risky sexual behaviour, young people using drugs and alcohol, youth with disabilities, orphans, young monks and nuns, domestic workers, girls working in drayangs (dance clubs) and uneducated young women in urban and rural areas.

A number of critical educational, social and economic issues have been identified by the NYP (2011):

- Costs of education especially for rural poor;
- Opportunities for continuing and re-entering education for early school leavers;
- Substance abuse and misuse;
- Access to services such as youth friendly health centers, counseling and rehabilitation services;
- Mismatch between education outcomes and employment needs;
- Break down of traditional family support system;
- Waning parental responsibility; and
- Generation gap between parents and children. (pp.16-23)

It may be stated that even prior to the National Youth Policy, the Bhutanese government had already recognised the importance of ensuring the wellbeing and developing the potential of its youth



over the decades in its planned socio-economic development. Nevertheless, despite these policy intentions and heavy investment in education over the decades, there has been critical gaps that needed to be addressed in terms of having a cohesive policy and a coordinated approach to the holistic development of Bhutanese youth (Choden, 2016).

Although the critical issues found in the NYP (2011) document are well defined in order to support vulnerable young people, it is whether or not these issues have become actual policies is debatable; thus, the implementation aspect leaves much to be desired (Choden, 2016). For example, the government has recognised that the costs of education especially for the rural poor are beyond their affordability but concrete based interventions seem to be lacking as one of the major reasons of school dropout is poverty.

Consequently, while one of the identified critical youth issues is to offer opportunity to out-of-school youth to re-enter mainstream education, this is rarely happening at the moment especially with dropout students. Similarly, while the government recognises that there is a mismatch between education outcomes and employment needs, no major action appears to have been taken except for the drafting of the Technical and Vocational Training Plan which is discussed in a separate subsection.

Furthermore, the NYP (2011) mentioned school dropout as one of the youth problems but there does not seem to be any student retention strategy or program put in place. Even policy makers do not appear to recognise school dropout as a serious problem as dropout figures appear trivial and small in numbers although in reality it carries significant consequences not only for individual themselves but it has bearings on the family and society as well (Dorji, 2005; Tidwell, 1988).

The NYP (2011) stressed the importance of mainstreaming youth programs across all sectors to project unique and diverse intervention strategies to address youth needs and to work in coordination in

an integrated, multi-sectoral and sustainable manner. There is a crucial need for an inter-sectoral approach to deal with the youth related issues. This multi-sectoral approach is necessary because of diverse and multiple youth challenges, needs and interventions required especially for the priority target groups. Although, a number of NGOs/CSOs and governmental programs targeted at youth do exist, the biggest hindrance is lack of coordination amongst the agencies which often duplicate services or work in isolation (Choden, 2016). She stated that “an inter-sectoral approach has been largely elusive. This can be attributed in part to a lack of commitment and consistency among stakeholders” (p.3). Moreover, most of the policies remain as plans without proper implementation due to budgetary and human resource constraints.

The NYP (2011) further emphasised that while the involvement of all agencies/organisations concerned with youth matters is necessary, they must complement each other and be responsive to the needs and opportunities of young people. Given the existing strong political commitment for youth by the government, the agencies within it need to act as the main agents, however maintaining the role and contributions of the non-governmental organisations, youth groups and the private sector is equally essential. A strong sense of ownership for the policy must be generated by all parties.

Additionally, in order to have such a multi-sectoral approach to youth issues, according to the NYP (2011), a National Youth Action Plan must be developed every three years to offer a practical response to the implementation of the NYP, reflecting its priorities and strategic themes showing multi-sectoral coordination. As a lead role towards this approach, the Department of Youth and Sports is mandated to take the responsibility for developing the National Youth Action Plan although all stakeholders concerned with youth development should be equally responsible. Yet, it is already mid-

2017 and there is no evidence of such an action plan.

Therefore, while the policy looks good on paper, it is the implementation aspect that is unimpressive. In relation to this policy gap, His Majesty the fifth King of Bhutan addressing the National Day celebration on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 candidly stated:

*With honesty, let me share some thoughts with you today. If we take a close look, we Bhutanese are good at writing plans, speaking well, and expounding ideas. But implementation falls short of commitments. There is gap between commitments made and output delivered. We are not able to deliver results of expected quality in a timely manner.*

The above statement by His Majesty the King speaks volumes for itself. Hence, it may be considered a policy failure unless the concerned government ministries or agencies have a re-look at the whole exercise.

#### **7.4.2. National Employment Policy**

The overall national employment policy is worth discussing here because it has direct relevance to the outcomes of the Bhutanese education system with the labour market situation in the country. According to the National Employment Policy (2013), “the Royal Government shall place employment generation at the core of national and local socio-economic development planning to address the employment needs of its citizens particularly, the youth and vulnerable sections of the society” (p. 3).

The youth unemployment is growing from 9.9% in 2007 to 12.9% in 2009 and the highest rates of unemployment are between the ages of 15 – 24 (NYP, 2011). Further, NYP also states that although youth unemployment has been growing on the one hand, there has also been growing demand for skilled

labourers and people with relevant market knowledge. However, many early school dropouts who look for jobs in the labour market are considered unemployable as they lack essential skills and knowledge.

As a result, there is a mismatch between the aspirations of young people entering the job market and available jobs and it is indeed a challenge for the policy makers. One participant remarked that “*it is a big challenge to provide skills to unemployed youth and school dropouts.*” Nevertheless, he was optimistic that the youth policy and employment policy that the government has initiated in the recent years would prevent youth anti-social behaviour and curb the unemployment problem in the country.

One of the policy objectives of the government is to send Bhutanese workers overseas for employment to solve the country’s youth unemployment problem. For example, the National Employment Policy (2013) stated that “the Royal Government shall explore employment of Bhutanese with firms abroad. While doing so, the Royal Government shall ensure the safety and security of such individuals” (p. 3). On the contrary, it may be argued that when there is a tremendous human resource requirement in the country, sending Bhutanese workers abroad for employment is disadvantageous in a number of ways. For instance, firstly, the step taken by the government indicates that it is not serious about solving the domestic unemployment issue. Sending Bhutanese overseas for employment is a temporary solution. Secondly, despite the need for human resources in the country, sending educated and qualified Bhutanese people overseas means there is going to be a brain drain which ultimately is a loss for the country. Finally, Bhutanese workers working overseas have already started facing problems of harassment and ill-treatment, exploitation and insecurity and a host of other job-related problems bringing disharmony and agony not only to individuals themselves but to the families and relatives back home. Therefore, the government’s initiative is certainly not a good policy move although it means

economic gain for the country in terms of foreign currency inflow.

As pointed out by the participants, one good employment policy that the government has espoused recently is the employment policy framework to assess formal qualification as well as recognition of prior learning (RPL). This indeed seems to be a forward-thinking policy and would certainly help re-engage young people especially school dropouts and unemployed youth with gainful employment prospects. This policy goes well with one of the objectives of the National Employment Policy (2013) that the “Royal Government shall prioritize training in order to re-skill and redeploy unemployed Bhutanese.” (p. 4).

According to the Regulations for National Assessment and Certification System for TVET in Bhutan (Ministry of Labour & Human Resources, 2015), the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework (BVQF) will recognise RPL “through assessment, recognizing competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning/training occurred.” (p. 2). Under the BVQF, competencies may be achieved through any forms of formal or informal training and education, community engagement, work experience or general life experience. After successful achievement of the assessment, the candidate will be awarded with a National Certificate, stipulating the occupation, competencies and the level of competence as per the criteria set forth for various vocations.

The certificates awarded by the BVQF shall be recognised by all concerned in the Bhutanese labour market such as private, public and corporate employers. After having attained certain level of competency, the employee is eligible to apply for further advancement of his/her skills and knowledge in their corresponding areas of vocations or similar fields. A level 2 certificate shall be treated as equivalent to grade 11 in general education and a level 3 certificate equivalent to grade 12 and the employee shall

be eligible to apply for enrolment in a diploma program.

Though this concept of RPL is quite new to Bhutan, the concept has existed elsewhere globally for many years. For instance, Pouget and Osborne (2004) stated that the concept of the accreditation of prior experiential learning in France was firmly rooted in the principle of continuing education linked to social justice. They further elaborated that this concept could be traced back as far as the French Revolution which linked learning, work, social justice and technological progress as educational policy. This trend has continued in France for centuries though evolving at various periods of time to suit the needs of the society.

Against this backdrop of social justice and transformation, experiential learning and practices are now developing within the contemporary discourse of lifelong learning, making the provision of education flexible at various stages of life through formal, non-formal and informal learning and duly recognising the competence gained through the accreditation system (Pouget & Osborne, 2004). Similarly, David (2007) stated that the statement "accreditation of prior learning", was widely known and understood, but to be more precise, it is broken down into two sub-sections: accreditation of prior certificated learning which is prior learning acquired on a certificated course undertaken at a college or institution; and, accreditation of prior experiential learning which describes learning that has resulted from life or work-based experiences. Therefore, these two approaches include policies and practices designed to accredit learning and achievement that occur in a work, community-based or related setting prior to the candidate's admission to a university, and through experience and critical reflection. Such a policy would help out of school and unemployed youth immensely.

Subsequently, according to Wihak (2007), the OECD reports (2002; 2005) also emphasised that

RPL would enable considerable gains that could relate to recognition of prior learning, predominantly in terms of encouraging adult learners to partake in education and training. For adult students, the use of RPL can considerably lessen the time and cost of finishing or upgrading post-secondary credentials. Further, Wihak (2007) stated that RPL also has numerous other benefits. It improves access to education and helps place learners at suitable levels within educational courses. It reduces the necessity for learners to study things they already know. It encourages learners to develop clear educational goals and plans. Research shows that RPL also improves learner confidence, self-esteem, and motivation to learn. Even licensing and certification agencies also benefit from RPL as significant information about what learners already know and capable of doing is gained. RPL can help verify if learners are qualified to write qualifying exams or undertake placements. It can also help to determine if applicants require additional training, and it can decrease costs by indicating training needs more precisely.

The policy of RPL would enable young adults, especially school dropouts, youth who exhibit anti-social behaviours and unemployed people, to benefit enormously in finding gainful employment. Since this is fairly a new concept, the government may conduct vigorous advocacy campaigns and encourage youth as well as parents to take advantage of the RPL for meaningful engagement and employment in various vocations of their choices and interests.

#### **7.4.3. *Technical and Vocational Education Training***

Besides the consequences of anti-social behaviour displayed by students who dropout, unemployment is another damaging concern for school dropout students. Bhutan's vision is to be a self-reliant, economically viable, environmentally sustainable, democratically and culturally vibrant, with a

highly skilled and knowledgeable society capable of facing the rising global challenges and ultimately contributing to the socio-economic development and wellbeing of the country (REC, 2012).

Therefore, politically and socially, as Bhutan is undertaking a rapid phase of globalisation, with an emphasis on market forces and communication technology, the Bhutanese education system should be dynamic and forward looking (REC, 2012). Subsequently, Rapten (2014) has suggested that educational institutes, as important source of knowledge and skills supply have to respond adequately to the changing requirement of the country's labour market. However, this is not the case at the moment. There is a high degree of youth unemployment at 9.6% (15 – 24 years) who lack proper skills for the labour market (Labour Force Survey Report, 2013; World Bank & National Statistics Bureau, 2014).

Rapten added that there appears to be a deficit in the education system in Bhutan. Both labour shortage and labour surplus co-exists simultaneously in the labour market highly indicating that there is a mismatch between the delivery of education and labour market. Actually, the statistics showed that job vacancies were higher than the registered job seekers. Against these entire odds and youth unemployment situation in the country, the following paragraphs examine the responses of the participants in connection to the challenges as well as the prospects of employment and economic opportunities provided currently to Bhutanese youth in general and the current situation of Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) and their intake capacities. The policy makers have the impression that a couple of VTIs in the country would solve the problem of engaging tens and thousands of unemployed youth in skill development programs when the statistics and the ground realities indicate a different story.

One participant stated that *“there are options to go to vocational institutes to enhance their*



*skills.” Likewise, the next participant also said that “equally important to give youth a diverse and robust array of opportunities for vocational and other training programs which will meaningfully engage them and help them to re-integrate into society as responsible members and citizens.” In the same way, another participant expressed that “VTI definitely is one of the ways forward to address grades 10 and 12 dropouts.” Nonetheless, the participants’ perspectives on imparting vocational skills to unemployed youth and school dropouts through VTIs requires further debate as the current policy trend looks inadequate and may need a review of policies.*

As discussed earlier in sub-section 4.11.1., unfortunately, the government is unable to absorb even one-fourth of the graduates of grades 10 and 12 into vocational institutes due to the lack of intake capacity. It has a serious policy implication as students from underprivileged family background can neither pursue further studies nor join vocational training institutes. It is contradictory against the Article 16 of the Constitution of Bhutan which states that the State shall provide technical and professional education to students after completion of grade 10 (UNESCO, 2011). When the government is unable to absorb even graduates of grades 10 and 12 currently, the question of imparting skills training to school dropouts and youth with anti-social behaviour is farfetched and daunting.

There is certainly a policy gap when the government is unable to train youth appropriately for the growing labour market demand when there is an unprecedented growing unemployment with 70,000 youth currently looking for jobs (PPD, 2012). The present employment situation in Bhutan depends on foreign skilled workers as Bhutanese youth lack skills and knowledge to be absorbed into the labour market pointing out a mismatch between job seekers and the labour market (Kinga, 2005; PPD, 2012).

The National Employment Policy (2013) stated that “the Ministry of Labour and Human

Resources shall allow recruitment of foreign workers only in those occupations where Bhutanese with appropriate skills are not available.” (p. 3). However, it may be argued that skills development in Bhutanese job seekers would not take place unless adequate opportunities are created by the government, based on market demand. For instance, Taylor et al. (1997) stated that if youth unemployment is simply considered as a problem of lack of skills, then it is due to the structural changes in the labour market influenced by globalisation. Therefore, appropriate policy measures are required to meet such challenges.

The reality of the labour market needs could be fulfilled if unemployed youth and dropout students who lack skills are trained as skilled workers by raising the intake capacity of government funded VTIs or encourage and maximise the private sector participation through their HRD plans by becoming both skills training providers and skill consumers (Kinga, 2005).

According to Raptan (2014), at the current situation, out of the total of 72,490 private sector employees, youth account for a mere 3.5%. This is because youth either lack skills or are reluctant to join the private sector, despite available vacancies, mainly due to lack of career development and training opportunities; job security and working conditions and poor remuneration. Such social and economic situations in the country pose challenges to the policy makers.

The current capacity to absorb a few hundred students by 11 governmental VTIs may be strengthened and alternative education programs like the GED certification program of the US and Australian CE programs as lifelong learning opportunities may be introduced for school dropouts for better productivity and sustenance. For example, in 2013, 11 VTIs had admitted only 1,311 students when there were 70,000 job seekers in the labour market (Annual Education Statistics, 2014) and 73

private vocational training providers charge fees (National HRD Advisory Series, 2015) making it impossible for poverty-stricken children to enroll in private institutes.

#### **7.4.4. Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014 – 2024**

Another government policy initiative in education is the formulation of Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014 – 2024. According to the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014), the Blueprint is a 10-year road maps to revamp and improve the overall quality of education system in the country; it was developed for two main reasons. First, it arose because of rising challenges and opportunities emerging due to globalisation of the economy and rapid technological development which required reforms in the education system to enable students to gain appropriate knowledge and skills to face the 21<sup>st</sup> century market economy. Secondly, there has been rising expectations and concerns of the society over the declining overall quality of education (Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014).

The Bhutan Education Blueprint is the result of the nationwide research carried out by the Ministry of Education and it is a road map proposing rethinking in education and taking drastic steps in responding to the challenges and changing needs of the time. The Blueprint is aimed at fulfilling the societal expectations and aspires to achieve the following outcomes: full access to education, achieving quality education, achieving equity in education and achieving system education. These four themed concepts are supported by 8 transformative shifts and 40 strategies which are being planned for the period from 2014 to 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2014). The eight shifts are as follows:

**Move 1:** Enhance access and equity to education.

**Move 2:** Revamp curriculum and assessment to enhance student learning.

**Move 3:** Raise learning outcomes of students to international standards.

**Move 4:** Transform teaching into a profession of choice.

**Move 5:** Ensuring high-performing schools and school leaders.

**Move 6:** Leverage ICT for learning.

**Move 7:** Enhance values education and wellbeing.

**Move 8:** System transformation, delivery capabilities and capacity. (p.91)

Further, the 10 years of the transformative period of the Blueprint is divided into three waves:

Wave 1 from 2014 to 2017, Wave 2 from 2018 to 2020 and Wave 3 from 2021 to 2024 (p.12). Each wave contains several initiatives. For instance, Wave 1 focuses on laying the foundation and initiating recommended interventions; Wave 2 focuses on accelerating the roll out of policy moves and carrying out the actual interventions and Wave 3 concentrates on moving towards achievement of excellence.

The Blueprint does appear to capture all the components required to initiate policy reforms for the overall development of the education system of the country in order to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is expected to overhaul the country's education system. Thinley (2016) stated that the Blueprint is the consolidation of previous policies into a single policy document which contains strategies called 'Education Shifts and game Changing Initiatives' for the government to adhere to for the next 10-year period. Similarly, Namgyel and Rinchen (2016) also stated that the most significant contribution of the Blueprint is that it has 'implementation teeth' with implementation timelines and budgetary provisions. In the absence of any comprehensive study carried out to study the impact of the Blueprint so far especially its Wave 1: 2014 – 2017 period, nothing could be said about its success or

achievement.

Correspondingly, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia had also carried out a similar exercise to prepare the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025 in 2013. The Ministry of Education initiated an all-inclusive analysis of the education system in Malaysia to develop a new National Education Blueprint. The requirement for such a document was felt in the rapid face of rising international education standards and increased public and parental expectations to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Both Bhutan and Malaysia have good blueprints to steer their education systems to newer heights in the next decade or so. Nevertheless, any well-conceived plan would go into disarray in the absence of strong monitoring and evaluation strategies as an ongoing process throughout the implementation period. In relation to Malaysia, they have put proper mechanisms in place for checks and balances. For example, there would be constant feedback dialogues based on differentiated performance and then providing rewards and consequences. On a six-monthly basis, the Minister has direct half an hour meeting with individuals in crucial positions in the Ministry to enable them to provide detailed performance assessments and feedback. The same procedure is followed down the ministry so that all responsible people conduct serious performance discussions with their subordinates. Following these discussion processes, officials and staff are provided with the professional development support required to enhance their performance. Even if after these discussions and feedback processes and professional development support, performance remains unsatisfactory over a certain time frame, employees are redeployed to other relevant roles, thus, it becoming a cycle of rewards and penalties depending on performances. In addition, the Malaysian

Education Ministry has a mandate to publicly commit to time bound targets and performance results which is brought to the notice of the public annually through publications, so that the public can track the progress of the Blueprint.

In case of Bhutan, though there is a monitoring and evaluation system put in place to check the progress of the Blueprint, it is vague. Unlike Malaysia, there is no responsibility fixed on anybody or any agency within the Education Ministry with specific timeline, accountable for the progress. Mention of schools, District Education Officers (DEOs) and Central Agencies as two-way reporting communication channels does not provide clarity. Hence, as pointed out by the National Council Education Review Committee (2016), there are robust policies and systems put in place but the implementation aspect is most often found wanting.

### ***7.5. Economic Opportunities and Challenges***

Even with political will and sound policy drives, most often, a developing country like Bhutan is confronted by scarce economic resources while the government is trying to offer economic opportunities to its people and ward off challenges. Responding to the question on some of the economic drivers and hindrances of the country, the participants expressed their perceptions. One participant said *“I don’t think that economic hindrance is a big issue. Yes, we don’t have the money and we have to get the money from outside, sometimes we have to beg, borrow but we have not compromised on these two important services: health services and education services.”*

Likewise, the second participant also expressed:

*I don't see any hindrances. In fact, I see entrepreneurship as a big scope in the forms of micro, small, medium cottage industry. Poverty alleviation is another target activity which should support education policy reforms. Debt management is also an important step. The present Rupee crisis is almost solved now which should work positively for improvement of education.*

As Bhutanese currency 'Ngultrum' is pegged with the Indian currency 'Rupee', it is a huge challenge for the country to maintain the Indian currency balance because trade between Bhutan and India is one sided as Bhutan has to import almost everything from India. In reality, this is a serious policy issue to consider by our policy makers and legislators sooner than later.

Yet, the third participant said

*of course, I mean economy is very important to take any reform or to initiate anything, be it in education, health, agriculture, everything, I mean economy is an important factor. So, like if we cannot spend that much money, I think policy would remain as policy. So, in order to implement, I think there should be budgetary support and it also is a huge implication.*

The fourth participant expressing about government initiatives offering economic opportunities to school dropouts and other unemployed youth said that

*there are hundreds of initiatives actually. Having dropped out, we create avenues for meaningful employment and therefore, to be able to engage them meaningfully in our economy in whatever little vocations that we would be able to create; that's why the Business Opportunity and Information Centre (BOiC) and the vocational institutes are all geared towards this.*

Basically, the participant above has made comments about two main issues: expansion of economy to provide economic opportunities to Bhutanese youth, and enhancement of skills through

vocational education training. BOiC, now known, as Rural Enterprise Development Corporation Limited (REDCL) is the initiative of the present government (People's Democratic Party - PDP) mainly aimed at providing funding to non-formal rural activities and also to boost the overall production level of rural communities. Any Bhutanese above the age of 18 is eligible to apply for a loan up to a maximum sum of Nu. 100,000.00 (approximately AUD 1995.65) for a period of 10 years with 4% interest per annum. School dropouts and unemployed youth are also eligible for the loan and if taken advantage of, could benefit them in a number of ways.

According to the REDCL (2017), since its inception in 2014, a total of 4,200 people have applied for the funds and 1,919 applications have been approved. Hence, the prospects look encouraging and beneficial not only to the loan applicants themselves but also to the society and the country, both economically and socially. Though, in the absence of any research undertaken on the impact of the REDCL fund, it is hard to comment.

Finally, the fourth participant articulated that *“for us, our kind of economy is an economy where we have jobs mostly in the highly specialized category and also in what people call it the blue color category where we need some sort of skills with the hands and so, this is a huge number of jobs that are available in our economy.”*

The availability of plenty of blue-collar jobs with the acquisition of some skills is a pertinent issue raised by the participant. However, the current trend spells that Bhutanese youth tend to look for white collar jobs when the market has to offer a number of blue color jobs; in addition, there is a mismatch between available jobs and skills acquired by job seekers (Kinga, 2005, Raptan, 2014). Blue collar jobs are supposed to be looked down by the Bhutanese society as a whole. This mindset has to



change if Bhutan is to progress as a nation.

Rapten (2014) stated that parents and families expect their children to work in the civil service in government offices rather than take up blue collar jobs or work in the private sector organizations. This type of societal notion is injected into the children's mindset from the very beginning of their schooling and is continued through the college/university until they try to seek job in government agencies which is quite hard to get because of tough competition and limited vacancies. In this context, what the government or the policy makers could do is to look at the current scenario holistically. Blue collar jobs may not seem exciting but fostering a pleasant work environment and attractive salary package and creating career opportunities for growth may go a long way in attracting talent and skilled young people. The positive image needs to be built.

To foster economic opportunities and mitigate challenges for the youth, the government initiative of establishing REDCL is a step towards the right direction. Such initiatives will have remarkable potential by encouraging entrepreneurship skills and enterprise culture in youth and providing entrepreneurship and financial education in higher secondary school, Vocational Institutes and tertiary education to venture into business and self-employment (Rapten, 2014).

## **7.6. Summary**

The policy moves such as Bhutan Education Blueprint, the National Employment Policy, the NYP, the concept of Central Schools, and Recognition of Prior Learning are aimed at removing obstacles within the school education system that hinder young people in completing basic education and ensure smooth transition between different levels of education. It also ensures access to high quality

education and the provision of high-quality Vocational Education and Training (VET). Even though, the policy moves of the government are fairly good, the concept of Central School and the institution of vocational training programs do require further review and appropriate action.

Equally, the Bhutan Education Blueprint looks impressive as a policy document; however, it looks too ambitious for a donor driven country like Bhutan. There are likely to be problems in implementing the entire 8 'Shifts' due to limited economic resources within a short span of time. Formulating a policy like the Education Blueprint is not a quick fix to solve all problems and there is no magical policy as such that may solve every problem. Therefore, prioritisation may be the key to attainment. Choosing just one or two areas from a host of areas to work on may make it more doable if screened. That is exactly what is being suggested in the concluding chapter. Following a funnel model of prioritisation of problems, a multitude of policy challenges derived from the study are screened through and the most pertinent issue, curriculum design for CE is recommended as a priority policy area.

## **PART C: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### ***8.1. Summary: Recapitulation of Purpose and Findings***

The purpose of this exploratory study was to capture the voices of the Cabinet Ministers about school dropout in Bhutan in order to gain insights as to what factors account for school dropout and retention and how this relates to policy development and implementation. Although, the researcher gathered enough data from the participants and supplementary documents, the findings could not be considered as expert views as the participants were policy makers and also the participation was from a small number of five ministers. Therefore, the findings could not be comprehensive which needs future studies. This research conducted individual interviews with the policy makers at the macro-level. Utilizing qualitative methods, the results of the individual interviews of the Cabinet Ministers were discussed and analysed in Chapters 4 - 6. The findings were supported by evidence derived from the policy documents, literature review and interviews with the participants. The study's major findings corresponded to the preamble and each of the four specific research questions which are summarised below in the following sections:

#### ***8.2. Research Question 1: Do existing top-level policies recognise the issues of poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment and anti-social behaviour in relation to school dropout?***

In accordance with research question 1, this study has found that policy makers are aware of not only the existing poverty and underdevelopment in the country but they also recognise that youth

unemployment and anti-social behaviour are on the rise. Most importantly, they recognise that poverty, unemployment and youth anti-social behaviour are associated with school dropout.

The societal characteristics like family and community environment are crucial factors in determining students' likelihood of dropping out of school. SES, poverty and other family factors are the major reasons for school dropout. Students are perceived to drop out of school due to poverty, involvement in child labour, lack of family support and migration of family from rural to urban areas. The crucial role that the family has to play in their children's education has been repeatedly emphasized by the participants.

The role of individual characteristics influenced by the surrounding circumstantial environment compels a student to decide to stay at or leave school. The most significant dropout factor related to personal characteristics that emerged from the study is the likely association between school dropout and anti-social behaviour. As revealed by the interview data and supported by literature, there appears to be a link between school dropout and anti-social behaviour but there is no evidence to prove that one of these is necessarily caused by the other. Moreover, not all school dropouts may commit crimes nor all youth exhibiting anti-social behaviour may drop out of school (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; DuPont et al., 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Jarjoura, 1993). This demonstrates that there are a number of other factors for school dropout and anti-social behaviour is not necessarily the sole factor.

An issue such as the one that follows should be raised with the relevant Minister:

- If indulgence in substance abuse by school students is occurring on an alarmingly large scale, despite its ban and imposition of penalties, the situation with out of school youth could be even worse. So, what are the policy strategies put in place to resolve such a menace in the

immediate future?

***8.3. Research Question 2: Are existing educational policies appropriate for a nation with these issues, according to Bhutanese policy makers?***

While answering research question 2, the existing educational policies do not appear to be adequate to address the above issues. For instances, drastic policy reviews and reforms are required particularly in terms of free education policy, teacher motivation and quality improvement and school curriculum reform initiatives which are relevant to social and economic needs of the country.

One important policy contention that emerged from the study was the rationale of providing free education to its citizens; this does not seem to serve the aim when a large number of students leave school before completion of basic education as they cannot afford the indirect costs involved (Dorji, 2005; Choden et al., 2014; Subedi & Nepal, 2010). Most of the participants (school dropouts) interviewed by Subedi and Nepal (2010) wanted to go back to school, and would have done so had the government supported them with uniform and other fees - this indicates that poverty is one of the major factors for school dropout. There exists a contradiction between the free education policy and hidden costs involved in schooling. The very purpose of the free education policy seems to be defeated. The government policy is not very clear on the issue of incidental costs that the parents have to bear on students' uniform, stationery, food and transportation etc. which are beyond the means of the poor and low-income families; this may be leading to school dropout. Therefore, it is policy makers' prerogative as to whether or not children in Bhutan are provided with adequate knowledge and skills to become productive citizens of the country, contributing to its socio-economic growth and human capital development in a growing skilled labour intensive economy.

This may only happen if policy barriers are removed and education is provided completely free based on equity as a long-term investment. A very good example of such future investment based on justice is spelt out by Grossman and Kim (1998) who stated that the type of human capital a country produces depends on its education policy. An egalitarian educational policy with good investment may create producers (productive citizens) while elitist educational policy may produce predators. Predators are people who are dependent on the products produced by producers. As a result of an egalitarian education policy, everybody is provided with good education including marginalised people while an elitist education policy provides excellent education to some select groups of people and others are left out with little or no education. This is a risk factor for a poor country like Bhutan, as it can widen the gap between the wealthy and underprivileged.

Hence, losing out on the education of young students through dropout and anti-social behaviour denotes that the country's capacity to have a highly skilled and knowledgeable work force is seriously hindered and social stability, better health and participation in civic and democratic processes are also hampered (OECD, 2015). Hence, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that students are given a high-quality education and training and the education system is equitable, contributing to the country's socio-economic growth and progress. In order to bring about policy reforms in response to such a problem, a change of law is normally required to solve it (Birkland, 2015). Furthermore, Apple (1996) categorically stated that unless the policy makers take the larger economic and social contexts into considerations, it would be almost impossible to fulfill the needs of youth. Therefore, he suggested democratic ways of offering equal opportunity of education and fair distribution of jobs to all.

Additionally, a number of themes related to policies emerged from the data such as enhancement

of teacher quality (as teachers in Bhutan seemed to be de-motivated in their profession); meeting the skills gaps between school education and the labour market which is believed to be leading to youth unemployment; instilling values and attitudes in young people; and, reviewing the current examination system that does not appear to be fostering appropriate learning. Consequently, besides the above themes, one of the pertinent themes to emerge from the analysis of data was the school curriculum. The findings suggest that participants have called for curriculum reform in the country to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The participant views are supported by studies reviewing the Bhutanese curriculum and quality of education that suggested reforms (e.g. ESRC, 2008; Ministry of Education Blueprint, 2014; REC, 2012; UNICEF, 2014).

**8.4. Research Question 3:** *Are there alternative policies which might better address the issues or is it possible to suggest which of the policies might have the most impact?*

Against research question 3, the study found that the government has put in place a number of policies to address the existing issues but some of them are inadequate and poorly implemented. For example, the youth policy lack communication and coordination between different stakeholders while the free education policy is found to be contradictory to what is being envisioned by the government due to hidden costs involved for students to bear.

Additionally, alternative policies such as the introduction of compulsory education through to grade 10, prevention of rural to urban migration, poverty reduction strategies and continuing education

programme might better address the issues. The current CE programme is focused particularly on the academic aspect only and does not lead to any skills development. Bhutan needs skilled workers to fill the current gap of skilled labour market demand. It is further deliberated under sub-section 8.7.1 as a recommendation.

**8.5. Research Question 4:** *How does policy in Bhutan impact upon student retention and dropout from the perspectives of policy makers and legislators?*

In response to research question 4, the study explored how policy and systemic interventions directly or indirectly influence student retention or what explains school dropout. Although, the policy makers have acknowledged that school dropout and youth anti-social behaviour is a problem in the country, there are no direct dropout retention policies and strategies put in place solely for that purpose. However, there are a number of programmes and activities which are geared towards successful completion of student graduation and character building, such as the zero-tolerance policy, student counseling, establishment of central schools, mindful (meditation) training, continuing education and skills training and so on.

The fact that although, these current interventions are in schools, these interventions do not look like they are working as students continue to drop out of school. Therefore, as expressed by the policy makers as well as supported by the literature and documentary evidences, more needs to be done for student retention. Consequently, literature also suggests that out of all systemic and programmatic interventions, education policy interventions at the macro-level is probably an effective approach to



resolving the education system's many problems (Dale, 1999; European Commission, 2013; Hunt, 2008; Kingdon et al., 2014; Little, 2011; Wilson et al., 2011).

### ***8.6. Implications of the study***

Bhutan has major issues with respect to poverty, unemployment, under-development, school dropout and anti-social behaviour. This project was an exploratory study to ascertain whether macro level policies recognised these issues. Although, data was gathered from a small number of five participants and based on their individual perspectives and also from the analysis of the government policy documents, it surfaced that there are a substantial number of policies in place but some of these policies appear to be unachievable. As a result, more often than not, the implementation aspect leaves much to be desired.

The study supports the argument for formulation of macro level policies that are achievable within the country's limited resources instead of setting ambitious goals which are unachievable. For instance, according to the National Budget report for the Financial Year 2016-2017, "as of 30th June 2015, the external debt stock was Nu.118,676.189 million (approximately AUD 2,367.758 million) accounting for 94.8% of GDP. Of the total, about 31.6% was convertible currency debt and 68.4% Indian Rupee debt" (Ministry of Finance, 2016, p. 8). The figures are worrying though, as successive governments keep on defending the fact that a major portion of the loans are acquired for hydropower constructions which is believed to be self-liquidating. Under such financial resource constraints, prioritisation of policies and programs within the limited available resources is of utmost importance.

Thus, this leads to the recommendations sections which are pertinent and doable within the financial limitations. The significant findings of the study in relation to policy reforms and systemic interventions (Figure 3) have culminated into four recommendations which are presented below in successive sections.

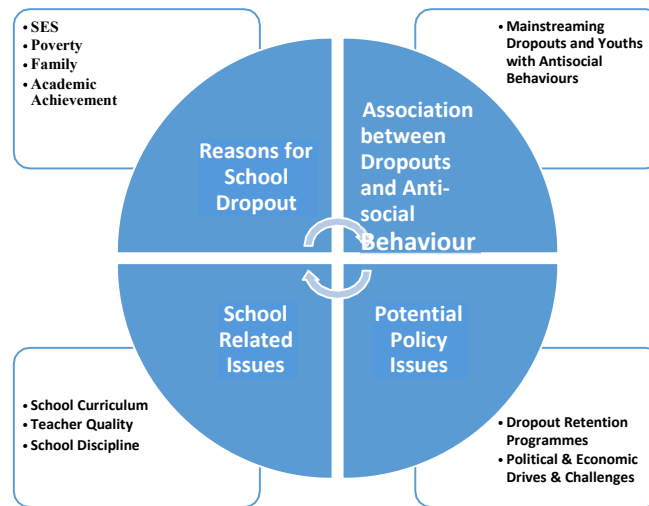


Figure 3. Analysis of policy reforms and intervention strategies culminating from the broader themes in the centre in blue.

## 8.7. Recommendations

Based on the perspectives of the governmental leaders who are likely to have responsibility for leading change within Bhutan, as well as the information from policy documents and the international literature, a number of recommendations have been developed. From the multitude of interconnected problems of declining quality of education to low teacher motivation, an ineffective assessment system to youth increasingly lacking values and attitudes leading to dropout and anti-social behaviour, unemployment and a rising gap between the skills imparted by school and the labour market requirement, this study offers evidence that a relevant curriculum design is one way of bringing about reforms in the overall education system, thus, addressing some, if not all, of the above problems.

Within this scope of prioritisation, providing a platform for school dropouts and youth who display anti-social behaviour to bring them into mainstream society through CE program appears encouraging. CE, as a lifelong learning opportunity has become extremely important since the world is going through a rapid process of change which is unprecedented. Therefore, CE, which could be pursued formally and informally, is not just the opportunity for school dropouts and youth who display anti-social behaviour alone but CE is now being increasingly used by almost all professions and workers in constantly changing industries and work places (UNESCO, 1993). In responding to a question, one participant said: *“engagement for our young children and no children, especially the younger children should miss out on this opportunity because education directly influences the life outcome.”*

With such an important statement made about education, curriculum design, especially for CE is discussed in the following subsection.

### **8.7.1. Curriculum Design for Continuing Education**

Curriculum is perceived by stakeholders as a dynamic structure which guides teaching and learning processes and is a defining instrument for enhancement of quality in education. For example, it features in many key European policy documents such as Europe 2020 and also Bhutan 2020. Findings from research studies suggest that the relevance of curriculum is not only imperative for improving the human capital resource by training young people but also for retaining learners in education and for promoting education as lifelong learning.

As pointed out by the data and some Bhutanese literature (Choden et al., Dorji, 2005; 2014; ESRC, 2008; Kinga, 2005; Ministry of Education Blueprint, 2014; REC, 2012; Subedi & Nepal, 2010), irrelevance of curriculum may be one of the obstacles to matching gaps between education skills and the needs of the labour market. Embracing learning approaches that promote positive outcomes while developing curricula is crucial. At the same time, valuing what learners know, understand and are capable of doing on completion of a learning cycle should be perceived by policy makers as an effective way to get rid of such potential mismatches and stimulate active learning and uphold inclusive teaching well supported by innovative assessment tools. One way of bringing about a tangible and effective strategy change may be CE or alternative education as an inclusive curriculum inbuilt within the school system or offered by other agencies through formal or informal programmes.

According to UNESCO (1993), learning needs vary as people take on new roles and as they grow older, learning tends to become less structured drawing towards more informal prospects for learning. Thus, opportunities for learning should be provided through different modes and modalities to suit adult needs and interests and a formal education institution is one such mode of options. Further,

UNESCO (1993) stated:

Some people may wish to continue for some years in formal education following straight on from primary school. Others may wish to seek education from alternative sources such as non-formal equivalency programs but return to formal education later. Some even may follow formal units of education quite late in life-even after retirement. Most people, however, tend to rely more and more on the informal system as they become older. (p.13)

Therefore, any CE program should make sure that a variety of agencies and modalities are available in all localities and that they offer a broad range of activities such as arts and crafts, dance and music, photography and cinematography, drama and acting, fashion and design and so on and not just focus on a few trades. CE programmes especially NFE programme which could cater pathways or certification to school graduation through public examinations like Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate (Grade 12) and Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (Grade 10) would be of tremendous benefit to school dropout youth. The NYP (2011) clearly stipulates that young people not in formal schooling will be provided with access to further education (NFE) and CE. However, the Non-Formal Education Programs administered by the Ministry of Education are meant exclusively for rural adults who did not attend school; they are aimed at promotion of basic literacy and the Vocational Education programmes are intended to be offered to students who complete grades 10 or 12 after they disqualify for government schools because of merit ranking.

Although, there is a Division called Non-Formal and Continuing Education Programmes under the Ministry of Education, the Division at the moment is entirely focused on promotion of basic literacy in the country as a UNESCO mandate of 'Education for All'. Thus, it is vital for the government to

revisit the existing policy or formulate a new policy to initiate alternative or CE programmes for school dropouts and youth displaying anti-social behaviour whose skills could be enhanced for their productivity as well as for the societal and economic benefits. This way, the government would be able to help youth acquire skills as well as developing the private sector.

This policy seems to be practiced successfully in Australia. Each year, about 70,000 people complete their continuing education programs in various forms of mainstream schooling or vocational certification courses. If such a policy existed in Bhutan, along with school and parental support, school dropouts themselves would be encouraged to re-enroll themselves. One participant summed this situation up rather well with his perspective when he stated that:

*I think if we can succeed in changing the mindset of our youth to look at our schools as centers of learning with fun, half our battle would be won. This cannot happen overnight, it will need sustained efforts from all players in the education system beginning with the change in the school itself perhaps, with an increased choice in games, sports and other extra-curricular activities and programmes, and in the efforts of the teachers, parents and guardians.*

Subsequently, a UNESCO Seminar held in Canberra, Australia in November, 1987 devised and adopted six categories of CE of which four categories are still relevant for adoption in Bhutan:

**Equivalency Programs:** These are designed as alternative education programs equivalent to existing formal general or vocational education. This program may be complementary to the Prior Learning Recognition drive recently, initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Royal Government of Bhutan.

**Quality of Life Improvement Programs:** These aim to equip learners and the community with

that essential knowledge, attitudes, values and skills to enable them to improve quality of life as individuals and as members of the community. This program could become supplementary to the existing Non-Formal Education program.

**Individual Interest Promotion Programs:** These provide opportunity for individuals to participate in and learn about their chosen social, cultural, spiritual, health, physical and artistic interests.

**Future Oriented Programs:** These give workers, professionals, regional and national community leaders, villagers, businessmen and planners new skills, knowledge and techniques to adapt themselves and their organizations to growing social and technological changes.

Similarly, alternative education programs, like the one in the US called the General Education Development (GED) test and various Australian certification programs for obtaining an equivalent diploma outside school look promising. According to Rumberger (2011), such alternative diplomas do not enjoy the equal economic benefits as regular graduates; however, it may still be worthwhile implementing as it will benefit out of school youth immensely in a number of ways. For example, according to Cumbo and Burden (2012), a re-engagement strategy such as alternative schooling for middle and high school students, has been found to be effective as it provides students with a number of choices for graduation through a more flexible and responsive learning environment.

Importantly, UNESCO (1993) further reported that education in some third world countries has diverted young people from mainstream society with tendencies of breaking down social systems and rising conflicts. This crisis in education is because of the formal education system catering to only a handful of successful students while the rest have tended to become unproductive. This is the risk for



Bhutan too with the rising youth problems. Hence, the policy makers could be mindful that CE has the potential to engage people in lifelong learning and thereby compensating for the shortfalls of the formal education system by giving people a second chance. It may in turn ensure a constant growth and development of human resources in the country.

While the government has the plan to extend the current CE program from higher secondary education to tertiary level education (Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014), there is a tremendous need to expand and diversify the CE program for the out of school youth.

#### **8.7.2. *Teacher Competencies***

In order to pursue curricula successfully, it may depend on how it is being delivered and in what kind of learning environments. As pointed out by the National Council Education Review Committee (2016), one of the ways forward could be to develop the professionalism of teachers through stringent selection and recruitment processes and vigorous training. Once in school, there is a need to provide continuous professional development training supported by both intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivational incentives. As Hattie (2012) stated that teachers' beliefs and commitments are the greatest impact influence on student performance over which we can have some control. Therefore, in order to deliver curriculum effectively in terms of student learning, the teachers' role is of paramount importance.

Though the Teacher Human Resource Policy (2014) stated that rigorous entry tests will be conducted to recruit the most competent candidates into the teaching profession, the current practice of

recruitment into the College of Education occurs electronically, purely based on the merit ranking without consideration for aptitude and attitude of the candidates. This selection process, as pointed out by the Ministry of Education and the College of Education, however, constrains selecting candidates with the right attitudes and aptitudes into the teaching profession. Moreover, both the Ministry and the College feel that the teaching profession is not the first career option for many and hence, only those candidates who do not qualify for scholarships and other higher studies apply to become teachers. Likewise, the current system of recruiting teachers through general Bhutan Civil Service Examination also appears to be problematic as the examination system does not test the requisite knowledge, aptitude and competency, genuine interest for teaching, love for children, and so on, which are prerequisites for the teaching profession (National Council Education Review Committee, 2016).

Therefore, in order to promote professionalism in teaching, the teacher recruitment system from Singapore could be replicated in Bhutan to provide quality teachers. According to the OECD (2010), Singapore follows all-inclusive system for selecting, training, compensating and developing teachers and principals instead of focusing on just one element. As a result of having high quality teachers and school leaders, their quality of education is of high standard. Their prospective teachers are recruited from the top one-third of the secondary school graduates bearing academic excellence and commitment to the profession. Teachers are also provided with attractive salaries on par with other professions. They are supported by constant professional development programs through various modes to keep themselves up to date with the rapid changes taking place in the world. As a mandate, teachers are required to undergo 100 hours of professional development every year. The Singaporean system has also put in place a steady career development path for teachers to progress in different career ladders. As a result, the

attrition rate of teachers in Singapore is mere 2% compared to Bhutan's 30% between 2011 and 2015 as pointed out by one of the participants.

Therefore, putting a proper system in place to recruit high quality graduates with sound academic backgrounds coupled with a positive attitude and aptitude may be vital in developing the teaching profession as a recognised and competitive occupation to ensure the delivery of quality education and the enhancement of appropriate learning.

High standard of professionalism and teacher competencies could be achieved if a governing body like the 'National Teacher Council' responsible for teacher certification and licensing; recruitment and deployment; recognition and rewards and welfare and redressal, is established at the soonest as recommended by the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014).

### **8.7.3. *Compulsory Basic Education***

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2008) mandates that education at the basic level is completely free, however, education is currently not compulsory. As a result, students have the freedom to leave school at any time of the school year (UNESCO, 2011; UNICEF, 2014). This causes huge damage to the students and to the society economically and socially. As studies have shown, in absence of such a law or policy, there is no responsibility and accountability fixed on anybody when a child drops out from school (Rosario et al., 2005).

According to Sabates et al. (2010), Tanzania has a compulsory education policy which is a very useful policy. It prevents students from dropping out of school and this might in turn reduce anti-social

behaviours if such a policy existed in Bhutan. Likewise, Sabates and Feinstein (2007) stated that the UK government has initiated a post-compulsory education policy for youth between 16 and 18 years of age to reduce crime in England and Wales.

Therefore, as suggested by literature, in order to prevent students from dropping out of school, making education compulsory may be one of the preventative measures adopted by a number of education systems worldwide which would not only retain students in schools, but reduce anti-social behaviour and unemployment. The Columbia district in the US, the UK, Wales, and Tanzania are good examples of policy initiatives with positive outcomes (DuPont, 2013; Machin et al., 2012; Jensen, 2002; Sabates et al., 2010).

#### **8.7.4. *Intake Capacities at Tertiary and Vocational Institutes***

The policy makers could review and initiate new policy in increasing intake capacity for access to higher education from the current mere 40% despite tremendous progress made in education from primary to tertiary. As per the enrolment ratios of 2012 of Raptan (2014), primary enrolment was 118%, lower secondary at 107%, middle secondary at 80% and 53% for higher secondary. While the current net primary enrolment at 95% (Annual Education Statistics, 2016) is increasing rapidly every year, enacting a firm screening process to enter tertiary education does not make much sense when hundreds and thousands of students are expected to graduate each year from secondary schools.

Therefore, the policy makers should consider creating more intake capacity for tertiary education (Kinga, 2005, Raptan, 2014). For example, in Mexico, with its capacity to grow economically,

the absorption rate of higher education is 85% which means there is not only a high rate of access to higher education with the likelihood of less dropout, but there is a match between the input of enrolment and the output of completing higher education (Kattan & Szekely, 2015). McLendon and Perna (2014) also stated that attainment of higher education is without doubt important for the social and economic development of individuals and society.

In the Bhutanese context, when the intake capacity for access to higher education is restricted to just 40% with a vigorous screening process, students seem to have less motivation and inclination for studies which lead them to dropout. As pointed out by Choden et, al (2014); Dorji (2005); Subedi and Nepal (2010), students said they dropped out of school when they saw no future job prospects as a lot of youth, some of them even with undergraduate degrees, are without employment and are loitering in the urban centres.

Similarly, Witte et al. (2013b) also stated that if students witness those both qualified and unqualified adults having the same unemployment prospects in the job market, they may be less motivated to continue their education leading to dropout. For that reason, it is imperative that the problem is observed from the perspectives of the Cabinet Ministers and Legislators and policy reforms are initiated. For instance, the government could strengthen the capacity of the private sector, which is contributing a mere 8% to national revenue, while there is mismatch between labour force skills and the market (World Bank & National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2014).

Likewise, it is equally important to expand vocational institutes to absorb more grades 10 and 12 students graduating each year. Such policy initiatives may prevent school dropout and reduce youth anti-social behaviour and ultimately, it may bring societal and economic benefits to the nation.

### 8.8. Autobiographical Reflection

Undertaking this research study had been an invaluable learning experience for me personally. I have gained some understanding of the nature of research and of the cyclical, sometimes messy, nature of the research process. I have learned, for example, that things do not fit neatly into categories and that research can be frustrating and sometimes tedious, yet at other times immensely rewarding and even exhilarating.

This research study has also provided me with some key ideas which have helped me examine my own professional values, and guidelines for possible changes to my own future study. The research process has also encouraged me to view the wider educational field and has provided a wealth of resources from which I can learn in order to improve the quality of education through policy reforms.

Finally, an excerpt from His Majesty the King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan who regards education as a cornerstone for the country's social and economic progress may be quoted here. His Majesty's inspiring address at the 3rd Convocation of the Royal University of Bhutan for Samtse and Paro Colleges of Education, held on 17 February 2009, sums up everything in regard to the country's education system and its need for teacher quality to uphold that higher standard.

*Our education system built and nurtured with your hard work and dedication has served us well. But we must understand that the times have changed here in Bhutan and all around us in the world. We cannot face new challenges with the same tools. The private sector is adjusting itself to new challenges and opportunities; the bureaucracy is finding its place in a new system of governance; the entire country is adapting to new roles in our young democracy. Thus, every*

*person and institution must evolve to meet the aspirations of our people and the changing needs of our nation.*

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A*

#### *A letter of request to participants*

Date:

Your Excellency (s),

I am a research student of Tasmania University, Australia, conducting a study on Education Policy and School Dropout in Bhutan. The project is being supervised by Professor David Kember and Associate Professor Karen Swabey, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania.

Currently, Bhutan is facing a growing problem of school dropout, especially between grades 7 – 10 as per the studies by Samdrup (2009); Nepal and Subedi (2010) and ADB and National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan (2013). The annual statistics of the Education Ministry (2010-2011) also showed a similar trend. When children drop out of school at a crucial transition point in schooling, questions do arise in terms of macro policy issues. Hence, capturing the voices of policy makers and legislators is expected to provide insights into the macro level policy issues, which are likely to have trickle down affect in terms of policy, mandates and system level support.

In this connection, a personal interview with the Cabinet Ministers will be carried out. Therefore, as the study is of national significance, I would like to invite you to participate in the study. However, participation in the study is purely voluntary. If you wish to participate in the study, the consent form duly signed by you will be collected for final recruitment of participants. A suitable date will be fixed



later in consultation with the participants for the interview.

The information sheet and consent form which are self-explicit are attached herewith for your kind information and perusal.

With kind regards

Sonam Gyamtsho

Research Student 197008

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## **Appendix B**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **An exploratory study of education policy and school dropout in Bhutan**

#### **The participant information is meant for Cabinet Ministers, Royal Government of Bhutan**

You are invited to take part in an exploratory study which is investigating the education policy in relation to school dropout and antisocial behaviour. The study supervisors are Professor David Kember and Associate Professor Karen Swabey, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania. The study is funded by the University of Tasmania.

Over the last ten years, Bhutan has recorded a growing problem of school dropout at the middle secondary school level. Hence, when children drop out of school at a crucial transition point in schooling, questions do arise in terms of macro policy issues. There is urgent need to look at not just risk factors for mitigation but review the policy holistically in terms of some of the systemic barriers (e.g. affordability, curriculum, capacity, infrastructure and support system) in schooling. Therefore, the best way to go about in this preliminary and exploratory study is to capturing the voices of policy makers and legislators who will provide insights into the macro level policy issues, which are likely to have trickle down affect in terms of policy, mandates and system level support. The findings from the study could have policy implications at the macro level by way of influencing educational as well as social policy reforms on such as: e.g. philosophy of education in terms of purpose of education and its productivity, compulsory schooling and alternative education and so on.

The researcher with the help of the supervisory team has decided to choose a distinctive yet

representative participants comprising of Cabinet Ministers from five ministries: (i) Education, (ii) Economic Affairs, (iii) Labour and Human Resources, (iv) Works and Human Settlement and (v) Agriculture. As the study has got national significance, the participants chosen for interviews is befitting and appropriate for the study because of the following reasons: Cabinet Ministers as policy makers are supposedly well qualified with experiences and expertise to be fully aware with the national goals and aspirations. Therefore, they are expected to have wider perspective and clearer picture of the problem, both policy and legislative wise.

The individual interviews will be moderated by the researcher using simple, straight forward and open ended questions, concerning education policy, school dropout and youth antisocial behaviors. Audio records of the individual interviews will be taped and after the transcriptions, the researcher will share the reports with the participants for their comments. Interviews will be convened in Thimphu, Bhutan, for conveniences of the participants and each session is expected to last for about an hour. As mentioned in the consent form, if a direct phrase or sentence or a viewpoint of a participant is quoted by the researcher in the study, his or her consent will be duly sought. It is supposed to be a low risk interview with no foreseeable risks. It may also be brought to the notice of all participants that their involvement in the interview is purely voluntary and they have the liberty to withdraw from the study at any given time without providing any explanation. In course of withdrawal after the data has been recorded, the researcher will arrange to destroy the data, if so desired by the participant as soon as possible.

The data collected will be securely kept at the University of Tasmania under lockers for five years from the date of first publication of the thesis and no identity of the participants will be disclosed at any point of time unless consent is given. However, disclosure of an identity by a fellow participant of the

focus group discussion cannot be guaranteed by the researcher. If the data is archived for more than five years for future use, consent will be sought from the participants. If not, data will be destroyed.

The participants will have access to the result of the study in two ways: First, the preliminary result of the study will be uploaded on the University website by October 2017: <http://www.utas.edu.au/research-admin>. Secondly, the study will be published in the form of a monograph soon after the submission of the thesis. Unless participant consent is obtained through the consent form, identity of the participants will not be revealed.

Participants may contact the following researchers for any questions or queries in regard to the study:

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The participants may also be informed that this study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on +61 3 6226 6254 or email [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au). The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number H0015300 in your correspondence letter. Finally, thank you for taking time to participate in this study. This information sheet may be retained by the participants. If you wish to take part in the focus group interview, you may please sign on the consent form and return it to the field assistant.

## *Appendix C*

### **Participant Consent form**

**An exploratory study of education policy and school dropout in Bhutan**

**The consent form is meant for participants namely: Cabinet Ministers, Royal Government of Bhutan**

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves a focus group interview in the form of discussion, moderated by a professional moderator and audio recordings will be taped. I also understand that I have to commit about three hours approximately and I will have the opportunity to review transcripts from the researcher.
5. I understand that participation in this study involves no foreseeable risk factors as such.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored at the researcher's institution  
i.e. University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed unless I give permission for my data to be stored in an archive.

I agree to have my study data archived. Yes    No

7. Any questions ☐ that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. ☐
8. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research.
9. I understand that the results of the study will be published, so that I cannot be identified as a participant.

However, if there is a need that the researcher wishes to quote me, I agree to be identified as a participant in the publication of the study results.

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.

If I so wish, I may request that any data I have supplied be withdrawn from the research until September 2015.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **Statement by Investigator**

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

☐

Investigator's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D

### Ethics approval

Social Science Ethics Officer  
Private Bag 51 Hobart  
Tasmania 7001 Australia  
Tel: (03) 6226 2763  
Fax: (03) 6226 7148  
Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

5 October 2015

Assoc Prof Karen Swabey  
Faculty of Education  
University of Tasmania  
Student Researcher: Sonam Gyamtsho  
Sent via email

Dear Assoc Prof Swabey

Re: MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL  
Ethics Ref: H0015300 - An exploratory study of education policy and school dropout  
in Bhutan

We are pleased to advise that acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences  
HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 2  
October 2015.

This approval constitutes ethical clearance by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human  
Research Ethics Committee. The decision and authority to commence the associated  
research may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For  
example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or review by  
your research governance coordinator or Head of Department. It is your responsibility to  
find out if the approval of other bodies or authorities is required. It is recommended that the  
proposed research should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual  
Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not  
submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may  
result in suspension or discontinuation of approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware  
of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics  
Committee, and to notify the Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease  
involvement with, the project.

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2. Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of  
the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee  
on 03 6226 7479 or [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au).
3. Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee  
immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen  
events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
4. Amendments to Project: Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval is  
obtained from the Ethics Committee. Please submit an Amendment Form (available on  
our website) to notify the Ethics Committee of the proposed modifications.
5. Annual Report: Continued approval for this project is dependent on the submission of a  
Progress Report by the anniversary date of your approval. You will be sent a courtesy  
reminder closer to this date. Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean that  
ethics approval for this project will lapse.
6. Final Report: A Final Report and a copy of any published material arising from the  
project, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Shaw  
Executive Officer  
Tasmania Social Sciences HREC

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## ***Appendix E***

### **Interview Schedule**

1. Why do you think children are dropping out of schools in significant numbers, despite the government providing them free education?
2. Does Bhutan have a definition of school dropout to clearly constitute what dropout really means in Bhutanese context? How should Bhutan define school dropout in your opinion?
3. Is the present school curriculum adequate enough to prepare students for their life after school?
4. Do you think Bhutanese teachers are motivated enough in their teaching profession? Why do you think Bhutanese teachers are leaving the education system at the moment in large numbers?
5. Do you think school dropout is associated with antisocial behaviours? How can these be understood in terms of policy and systemic support rendered to schools?
6. What is the impact of zero tolerance policy introduced in schools? Does it contribute effectively in helping improve students' behaviour or otherwise does it have an adverse effect?
7. What could be done to bring back youths with antisocial behaviours, without formal training or basic education to main stream society?
8. What policies or programs could be put in place to increase retention and decrease antisocial behaviours?
9. What political and economic conditions drive or hinder education policy reforms and its implementation?

## Appendix F

### Annexure 2: 30<sup>th</sup> education policy guidelines and instructions 2012, Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan, Thimphu.

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#### Annexure 2

##### Guidelines for School Discipline Policy

###### Rationale:

As the foundation for all development, education moulds and shapes the future of a nation and determines the quality of its citizens. Accordingly, the Bhutanese education system strives to provide a holistic, contemplative, eco-sensitive, and culturally responsive education so as to produce responsible, loyal and productive quality graduates with the right values. The Educating for GNH programme is an approach adopted to ensure the integration of the desired qualities into the Education System so as to produce GNH graduates. In order to achieve the desired goals of education, the quality of teaching learning in our schools and the supporting environment for that to happen are of paramount importance.

One of the most important factors for ensuring the quality of education and its supporting environment is the social order and harmony in our schools. Schools must be safe and happy places where teachers and students co-exist peacefully and harmoniously. Students graduating from schools must be disciplined and well mannered, with not only academic knowledge but also the ability to integrate into society as responsible, patriotic and productive citizens. Discipline and decorum in schools must necessarily spill over into public spaces and social life. Similarly, lack of discipline and the right values and attitudes in school would spill over into the social spheres and vice-versa. Therefore, the institution of a proper disciplining mechanism is important, and while all schools have their own discipline policy, their effectiveness in building zero tolerance to indiscipline needs to be reviewed.

It is in this context therefore, and also in keeping with the recommendation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Education Conference for national level discipline guidelines, that the Guidelines for School Discipline is formulated.

The guidelines shall provide a broad framework for schools to review their school discipline policies and manage disciplinary issues professionally and consistently. With the intention of empowering schools to work effectively towards zero tolerance to indiscipline, the ultimate aim of the guidelines is to make the schools safe, secure and conducive learning spaces, with the ability to produce graduates with the right human values, beliefs and attitudes, as well as a strong sense of *Driglam Namshel*.

###### Objectives:

The discipline policy and strategy may differ from school to school due to differences in level, location and management set up of the schools. While such differences are

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good to encourage diversity, it is important to reduce wide variations in the way the schools manage discipline issues. It is desirable that schools approach discipline issues coherently and consistently. Therefore, this guideline intends to:

- Provide broad guidelines for the schools to review and come up with their own comprehensive and coherent discipline policy;
- Guide the schools in formulating clear rules and regulations to support school discipline;
- Mandate the schools to implement the policy with fairness and consistency while addressing disciplinary issues;
- Reiterate the importance of bringing on board the parents and other stakeholders;
- Empower the schools to be responsible and accountable for their own disciplinary actions;
- Continuously work towards zero tolerance to indiscipline in the schools; and
- Make the schools safe, secure and conducive for learning.

#### **Expected Outcomes**

The implementation of the Zero Tolerance to School Indiscipline Policy is expected to lead to the following outcomes:

- Safe and secure learning environment in the school;
- Parents are on board as active partners in the education of children;
- Less disparity in the identification of offences and application of sanctions;
- Students are fully aware of the consequences of their actions;
- Increased transparency and accountability in the school system;
- Schools are empowered and are more accountable for their decisions;
- Teachers are respected and motivated;
- Values of Driglam Namzha inculcated in schools;
- Minimal or no major disciplinary issues;
- Students' overall performance improved.

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**Approach:**

This guideline is to be referred by the schools during the review of their school discipline policies and strategies. Schools should not be limited by this guide and it is important they adapt this guide according to their level and size of the school. The following approaches are suggested:

- Schools use this guide as a reference to formulate a comprehensive school discipline policy and strategies;
- School discipline policy clearly specifies the offences and sanctions for breach of school rules and regulations;
- School discipline policy is clearly understood by all school constituents including parents. Parents to sign an undertaking to abide by the Policy;
- Schools maintain well documented clear disciplinary records for interventions, offences and sanctions;
- Schools institute School Disciplinary Committee and School Management Board to support the school in disciplinary issues;
- Schools implement the discipline policy firmly and consistently;
- All disciplinary actions to be based on the written School Discipline Policy;
- All teachers and staff members of the school to be responsible for ensuring compliance to the Discipline Policy;
- Information on severe actions / sanctions such as suspension and expulsion must be shared with the concerned authorities;
- Schools to record student information accurately, including on the Character Certificate (CC) and Transfer Certificate (TC) documents and under no circumstances can they be changed. (for further information on the character certificate, refer to Page 25 - 29)
- The child involved in a major disciplinary case to be given sufficient hearing time;
- As far as possible, parents to make themselves available when contacted by the school. However, in remote areas where parents are unable to come to the school, it is suggested that a focal person from the village be identified as the contact person (e.g. Ishogpa) between the school and the parents;
- Where a school feels that a child with disciplinary problems may improve in a new environment/school, the school may advise the parents to take the child to another school;

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- Schools shall not entertain any verbal instructions from any agencies/individuals;
- Any complaints against a teacher, staff member or student must be made to the principal and under no circumstances can a parent/guardian directly confront the teacher, staff member or student;
- DEOs to monitor and report on the implementation of the guidelines and report on the progress/improvement in school discipline.

**Preventive measures and support services:**

A good school discipline policy must primarily ensure a conducive environment for the development of appropriate behavior in the students. The following are some of the suggested preventive interventions:

- Set clear standards of behavior, expectations and consequences;
- Be firm and consistent in implementing school rules;
- Provide career education services;
- Provide counseling services;
- Enhance life skills education;
- Address the needs of the children;
- Initiate community service projects;
- Institute parent support groups;
- Strengthen SPEA programs;
- Institute award system in various fields;
- Ensure active engagement of children;
- Enhance Choeshay and Driglam Namzha programmes.
- Help may also be sought using the various mechanisms available as mentioned in Help lines (Page 24).

**Types of offences and sanctions (framework):**

Depending on the severity of the violation of school rules and regulations, types of offences in the schools and sanctions are **suggested** and classified into three levels:

Level 1: Minor disturbances to school order	
Offences	Possible sanctions (one or more sanctions can be applied as is appropriate)
Absentecism	Teacher - child conference
Tardiness	Child-counselor conference
Violation of school dress code	Reminder to student
Graffiti	Undertaking letter from student
Tattoos	Additional assignments
Littering	Peer separation
Possession of unauthorized gadgets	Detention work
Possession of indecent material	Denial of privileges (barring from participation in programmes of their liking)
Indecent language	Parent / guardian notification
Negative peer pressure	
Mischief	<b>Note:</b>
Petty theft	1. Counseling is not a sanction, but a student support service
Disrespectful behavior	2. Repeated offences (school will determine the frequency) in level 1 will tantamount to level 2 sanctions
Harassment	
Business transaction	

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Level 2: Violation of school rules and frequent violation of level 1 offences	
Offences	Possible sanctions (one or more sanctions can be applied as is appropriate)
Frequent violation of level 1 offences	Teacher-child conference
Insubordination	Counselor – child conference
Possession of harmful substances	Principal - child conference
Substance abuse	Principal- parent conference
Dishonest behavior	Discipline Committee's intervention
Plagiarism	Undertaking letter from child
Trespassing	Written warning to the child
Unruly behavior	Parent / guardian undertaking
Inappropriate relationships	Suspension
Defamation	<b>Note:</b>
Discrimination	1. <i>Counseling is not a sanction, but a preventive and corrective intervention</i>
Gambling	2. <i>Repeated offences (school will determine the frequency) in level 2 will tantamount to level 3 sanctions.</i>
Bullying	
Level 3: Severe violation of school rules and national laws or frequent violation of level 2 Offences	
Offences	Possible sanctions (one or more sanctions can be applied as is appropriate)
Frequent violation of level 2 offences	Undertaking letter from the child
Groupism for ulterior motives	Undertaking letter from parent /guardian
Physical fighting and gang fights	Suspension
Proving	Expulsion*(For details see remark 6 below).
Damage to property	
Malpractice in exams	
Break-ins	
Possession of harmful weapons	



Remarks:

1. The offences and sanctions outlined above may not be comprehensive. Schools can further identify specific offences and develop their own sanctions based on the severity and frequency of the offences committed.
2. Offences related to pregnancy that warrant interventions of the law shall be dealt with as per legal provisions.
3. Disciplinary actions shall also be taken even if the offences are committed outside the school.
4. **Suspension:** Suspension is a temporary removal of a student from school for committing either one or more of the offences of level 3. It shall be sanctioned for a maximum of 12 school days. The period of suspension shall be treated as absent. Corrective measures such as assignment, additional works can be assigned to be supervised by parents. The student will not be accepted back until the assigned task and other requirements prescribed by the school are fulfilled.  
  
Suspension can also be sanctioned for one academic year to a student requiring rehabilitation.  
The student must be issued with a written order and handed over to the guardian/parent.
5. Offences of criminal nature shall be dealt with as per the law of the land. The student shall not attend classes during the hearing of the case. The student if proven guilty of the crime, by verdict of the court, may be expelled depending on the nature of the crime. However, if the student is innocent or if the student is called as a witness, attendance shall be considered.
6. **Expulsion:** Expulsion is the last resort and can only be applied after taking a series of preventive and corrective measures. The decision to expel a student can only be taken through wider representation in the discipline committee including the SSB. It should, moreover, be preceded by suspension unless the offence is of criminal nature. Expulsion is the permanent removal of a student from school for committing more serious offences and/or conviction of a crime (of serious nature). The student must be issued a written order along with all disciplinary records outlining the measures undertaken to correct the child, transfer certificates and any other relevant documents and handed over to the guardian/parent.  
  
A student once expelled cannot attend any school in the country.  
A student below the age of 14 may not be expelled.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, all schools must work towards creating a safe and secure environment and it can only be done if all schools put in place a clear and comprehensive written Policy on School Discipline. The School Discipline Policy must be implemented strictly and consistently, and it must be complied with by all concerned. Failure to comply with the policy also must be dealt with, consistently and strictly, and without fear or favour.

**Help lines:** The following help lines are recommended to help schools deal with discipline issues and especially if the discipline issue is beyond the school's tolerable limit:

- Toll free Nazhoen Helpline 214 of Career Education and Counseling Division, (CECD).
- Toll free helpline 202/212 of Health Information Service Centre (HISC), Thimphu.
- Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Drug and Alcohol Dependence (TRCDAD), Thimphu 02-389445
- Psychiatric Ward, Thimphu 02-322496 (ext.415) or [info@bhutanyouth.org](mailto:info@bhutanyouth.org)
- Youth Development Fund (YDF), Thimphu 02-327483 (ext.223)
- Bhutan Narcotic Control Agency (BNCA), Thimphu 02-335371/336577
- Youth Centre (YC), Thimphu (near taxi parking), housed within the HISC 02-333503 or [dictthimphu@gmail.com](mailto:dictthimphu@gmail.com)
- Youth Centre (YC), Phuntsholing 05-253627 mobile # 17658329
- YouthCentre (YC), Gelephu, mobile # 17612557
- Youth Centre (YC), Trashigang, 04-521115
- Youth Centre (YC), Paro, 08-272167

## CHARACTER CERTIFICATE RUBRICS

Sl. No	Personal Qualities	Criteria	Rating
1.	Leadership Quality	a) Captainship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school captain</li> <li>• house captain</li> <li>• class captain</li> <li>• club captain</li> <li>• committee member</li> <li>• Games &amp; sports captains</li> </ul>	More than 3-Outstanding 3 – Very good 2 – Good 1 – Satisfactory
		b) Taking initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organize program</li> <li>• organize social work</li> <li>• co-curricular activities</li> <li>• group work</li> <li>• takes lead role</li> </ul>	More than 3-Outstanding 3 – Very good 2 – Good 1 – Satisfactory
		c) None/no initiatives	Unsatisfactory
2.	Punctuality	a) submission of work in time	Fulfills all- Outstanding
		b) Regularly attend co-curricular activities (cultural programs, games & sports, morning assembly, evening prayer, studies, classes, SUPW etc	Miss once - V Good Miss twice –Good Miss four to five times- Satisfactory
		c) Coming in time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After any leave taking</li> <li>• After break (Mid Term)</li> <li>• In class, co-curricular activities, studies, meals.</li> </ul>	Miss more than five times- Unsatisfactory

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3.	<b>Honesty &amp; Integrity</b>	a) Sincerity at work	
		b) Being present in all the activities	
		c) Abstaining from smoking, substances abuse etc.	Fulfills all-Outstanding
		d) Returning school resources intact(books, equipments, lost and found things etc)	Commit once- V Good
		e) Positively reporting for assigned task	Commit twice- Good
		f) Being honest with the teachers, elders, staff & friends.	Commit 3-4 times
		g) Always following the school norms	Satisfactory
4.	<b>Willingness to Adapt to Rules</b>	a) Follows school rules at all times	Commit 5 times & more- Unsatisfactory
		b) Follows school rules almost all the time	
		c) Follows school rules sometimes	Outstanding
		d) Follows school rules rarely	Very Good
		e) Hardly follows school rules	Good
5.	<b>Respect for others</b>	a) Shows respect to teachers, staff, elders, juniors and friends at all times and all places with Driglam Namzha	Satisfactory
		b) Shows respect some people sometime	Unsatisfactory
		c) Respects occasionally	
		d) Respects rarely	Outstanding
		e) Paying no heed to others most of the time	Very Good

6.	<b>Civic Sense</b>	a) Covering and caring books	
		a) Taking care of public property (building, toilets, electric points water taps, furniture, classrooms etc)	Fulfills all-Outstanding Lack one – Very Good
		b) Volunteer for social work	Lack 2- Good Lack 3 –Satisfactory
		c) Helps to keep school campus clean always by picking up litter without being told so d) Cares personal cleanliness (body, dress, shoes, bed etc)	Lack all-Unsatisfactory
7.	<b>Creativity</b>	a) Classroom arrangement	
		b) Making use of old things (e.g. Making waste bins out of the old tins)	Fulfills all-Outstanding Fulfills 4 – Very Good
		c) Creative in cultural programmes (e.g., Hall decoration, different ideas used in presenting items)	Fulfills 3 – Good Fulfills (1 / 2) – Satisfactory
		d) Anything created in the school (flower gardens, models, waste bins etc)	None –Unsatisfactory
8.	<b>Participation in activities</b>	a) Games and sports	Fulfills all-Outstanding
		b) Cultural activities	Fulfills 3-Very Good
		c) Literary activities	Fulfills 2 –Good
		d) Any other activities organized for activities	Fulfills 1 –Satisfactory None-Unsatisfactory
9.	<b>Work Ethics</b>	a) Takes up whatever task assigned positively	Fulfills all- Outstanding
		b) Work being done without supervision	Fulfills 4- Very Good
		c) Shows interest and care to work	Fulfills 3- Good
		d) Upholds dignity of labour e) Timely completion of work	Fulfills (1-2) Satisfactory None – Unsatisfactory

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10.	<b>Conduct</b>	a) Good manners with teachers, elders, siblings, juniors, other staff and other community members	Fulfills all-Outstanding
		b) Good manners with friends	Fulfills 2 –Very Good
		c) Self discipline (e.g. Dressing, way of talking, hair style, moral behaviour etc. both inside and outside school compound).	Fulfills 1-Good
			Fulfills a part –Satisfactory
			None – Unsatisfactory

**Criteria Guidelines**

- Each quality is assessed out of 10 points and total is out of 100.
- To find out points acquired in CC divide the total points by 100 and multiply by 10.
- A child must get a minimum of 4 points in CC to qualify

**Grading points:**

- ✓ Outstanding: 9-10 (A)
- ✓ Very Good: 7-8 (B)
- ✓ Good: 5-6 (C)
- ✓ Satisfactory: 3-4 (D)
- ✓ Unsatisfactory: 1-2 (E)

**Note for the teachers:**

- ✦ A child must be assessed in Character development at least twice a year. Character certificate is inbuilt with the result sheet.

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## ***Appendix G***

### **Audit Trail**

Feb, 2015	Attended Graduate Research Certificate Training XGR 501.
July 2015	Identified potential participants and selected the site for data collection.  Communicated through writing with the Cabinet Secretary regarding the proposed study and personal interviews
August 2015	Worked with peers doing similar qualitative research to share and complete peer review of qualitative procedures.
Aug - Oct, 2015	Made methodological determinations through dissertation seminar and began preparations for literature base.
Nov, 2015	Established face to face communication with the selected participants to inquire about their interest in study participation.
Dec, 2015	Followed up communication with the Personal Assistants of the participant ministers to fix appointments for personal interviews.
Feb, 2016	Received letters from the participants, confirming to participate in the interviews.  Accordingly, followed up with the Personal Assistants to fix schedules and venues for the interviews.
Feb – March, 2016	Prepared for the interviews: Arranged equipment, worked on interview questions and carried out literature review.
April – May, 2016	Explained the informed consent form and process to participants.  Conducted personal interviews with five participants.

June 2016	Performed transcription and analysis process of all five interviews.
July 2016	Conducted follow-up communications with five participants providing them the opportunity to review transcripts.
July – Aug, 2016	Data analysis through transcript review.
Sept - Oct, 2016	Requested peer and colleague review as findings and themes emerged.
November 2016	Thesis writing process began



